

CHALLENGES OF DEVELOPING A CROSS-CULTURAL CHURCH

CLOVERLEAF, TEXAS

A THESIS-PROJECT

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BY

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This thesis is dedicated to the
Church of God of Prophecy
leadership and the emerging leaders
they mentor.

Go everywhere in the world. Tell the Good News to everyone.

— Mark 16:15

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ABSTRACT

Challenges of Developing a Cross-Cultural Church - Cloverleaf, Texas is a thesis-project written for the Doctor of Ministry degree at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary. This written work addresses the challenges of revitalizing one local church functioning within the infrastructure of an international organization. Some of the problems encountered in this case were traced back to historical events that had ministerial praxis impact in other places where the Church of God of Prophecy has presence. A paradigm shift in exclusivity ecclesiology determined the path from closure to engaging with the community, and being an expression of Christ. The focus shifted from maintaining the status quo in a survival mode towards partnering with other like-minded organizations for the benefit of the citizens.

Within my sphere of ministry, there are other local congregations facing similar conditions presented here. Hopefully, the qualitative data gathered for this study will benefit the emerging leaders who accept the responsibility of revitalization. The challenges could not be met alone, God's kingdom goes beyond the institution. Practical ministry crosses every cultural barrier to the "Good News", and the "Cross of Christ" gives life to all peoples, in every nation.

CHAPTER ONE: PROBLEM AND SETTING

A HOMOGENEOUS CHURCH IN A MULTI-CULTURAL SOCIETY

Introduction

A Pentecostal church established in the Houston, Texas metropolitan area was faced with possible closure after more than seventy-five years of Christian ministry. The Cloverleaf Church of God of Prophecy, hereafter noted as COGOP, had historically earned a reputation within its governing infrastructure for being a good place for pastoral appointment, and an effective Christian service within the community. However, a slow decline in ministry effectiveness and attendance gradually led towards a critical point of disbanding the local congregation. Being geographically located in a high-crime area threatened the loss of property, so an option to sell was under consideration. By the time my assistance was requested in December 2011, other religious groups were already inquiring about the facilities. A handful of members remained without qualified pastoral leadership, nor sufficient financial support for maintaining the property, so the situation challenged the very existence of the local church.

Not an Isolated Problem

Cloverleaf, was my third pastoral appointment in Texas, the first being in Kingsville (1986), and the second in Bacliff (1997). At the times of appointment, each of these local congregations was struggling to survive. The similarities in their ecclesiastical ethos are worthy of note: Elderly members faithfully maintained the facilities with minimal resources; they shared the same ecclesiastical background with its societal

norms, rulings, and traditions; there was a strong belief in having unity among all Christian denominations with a “one body” mentality; they had the same Pentecostal roots; the people took pride in adhering to the rulings handed down to them from a centralized government; and English was the primary language for worship services, Bible classes, and business. Therefore, the situation experienced by the Cloverleaf COGOP was not isolated to just one geographical area because the same cultural ethos existed in all three localities. This written work addresses the need for Spiritual revival in declining Pentecostal churches.

Spiritual Formation of a Homogeneous Church

The Cloverleaf community was just one of many places where Pentecostal pioneers built houses of worship, and whose ethos called for a unified body. The beliefs and practices, developed over time, contributed to the formation of a homogeneous cultural congregation that had difficulty relating to a diverse multi-cultural community. It had become a society comfortable with speaking the same language and conforming to the same traditional norms. Since culture is the way people live at a particular time and place, it is reasonable to say that the cultural beliefs, social forms, values, practices, and behaviors of a church could be effective at one point in time, and become ineffective seventy-five years later within a changing society.

The Language Barrier

In a homogeneous culture, the people are comfortable with one language. English was the primary language when Cloverleaf COGOP was organized, and local records

show that every appointed pastor to this local church was English-Anglo from 1950 until my appointment in January 2012. A language barrier did not exist between the English-speaking church and community during the early developmental years, as the primary language in Cloverleaf, Texas was also English. But, recent statistics reveal that Hispanic migration has changed the face of this community, bringing their unique cultures with them. Spanish is currently spoken in the homes of nearly seventy percent (67.1%) of the population. This high percentage ranks Cloverleaf fifth in the entire Harris county for Spanish-speaking populations.¹ A language barrier now exists, and helps to widen the gap between an English-speaking congregation, and a predominantly Spanish-speaking community. Communicating the Gospel to Spanish speakers, and working together with different cultures towards the same purpose becomes problematic for a homogeneous society.

Exclusive Body Ecclesiology

One of the most visible similarities among the churches to which I was assigned as pastor, was exclusivity. The following historical event gives a basis for this doctrinal belief.

At the end of the 19th Century, a compact was made by a small group under the name Christian Union which impacted the foundational beliefs of this movement for more than 100 years. R. G. Spurling, a Missionary Baptist preacher, led a meeting conducted on Aug 19, 1886, in Monroe County, TN. The agreement was . . .

¹ "Statistical Atlas," Languages in Harris County, Texas, last modified April 28, 2015, accessed September 28, 2017, [http://www.statisticalatlas.com/county/Texas/Harris County/Languages](http://www.statisticalatlas.com/county/Texas/Harris%20County/Languages).

“... to take the New Testament, or law of Christ, for your own rule of faith and practice, giving each other equal rights and privilege to read and interpret for yourselves as your conscience may dictate, and ... sit together as the Church of God to transact business as the same ...” Their stated intention was “to restore primitive Christianity and bring about the union of all denominations.”²

This act was an attempt to free themselves from all man-made creeds and traditions with a vision of restoring God's church for all believers. “One of the results of the restorationist impulse ... has been an exclusive body ecclesiology which ...

... produced a view of history that said Jesus founded the church on Mount Hattin (Mark 3:13ff). This body survived until A.D. 325, at which time it ceased to exist as before because it was layered over with much foreign matter. But layers began to be removed by Luther, then Wesley, etc., until the complete revelation was unveiled on June 13, 1903.³

This claim had adverse effects on those outside the organization because it resulted in an ongoing exaltation of the church. Although the exclusivity issue was officially reversed by the 91st General Assembly in July 2000, stating that, “no single group can lay claim to being the exclusive body of Christ,”⁴ there has been little change in ministerial praxis.

Each of the Pentecostal congregations, mentioned above, firmly held to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit to empower people to be agents of change for transforming lives. What has happened to the power?

Pentecostal Spirituality

Historically, this movement “leaned toward Pentecostalism even before the turn of the twentieth century. ... after the outpouring of the Spirit during the great revival at

² C. W. Conn, “Church of God (Cleveland, TN) CG History,” in *New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*. ed. Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. Van Der Maas, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002, 2003), 529-30.

³ H. D. Hunter, “Church of God of Prophecy,” in *New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*. ed. Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. Van Der Maas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002, 2003), 539-542.

⁴ Church of God of Prophecy. “Minutes of 91st General Assembly.” July 2000, 105.

Azusa Street in Los Angeles in 1906, the Church of God fully embraced the Pentecostal movement. . . . In 1908, the General Overseer, A. J. Tomlinson, received this experience, and envisioned a world-wide harvest for the church through missionary outreach. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit with the initial evidence of speaking in tongues was unanimously adopted by the Assembly in 1911,” and became one of the church's prominent teachings.⁵ “The great interest in world missions joined with the church's deepening exclusiveness in the early 1940s. It opened the door for interracial worship and fellowship, but was suppressed because the church was centered and concentrated in the South. Nevertheless, the church was probably the first to defy Jim Crow laws.”⁶

A world-wide vision empowered by the Holy Spirit created a far-reaching missionary urgency to reach the nations of the world, and the church message reached my Filipino family. In the early 1940s, Pentecostalism and missions penetrated our whole family life. My father, Santos A. Cabales, was already familiar with the powers of the spirit-world long before he experienced a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. He had received Satanic power in the year 1937 and was practicing witchcraft at the time of his conversion to Christianity.⁷ Through his ministry, I observed the power of the Holy Spirit, and came to understand that a counterfeit spirit also existed.

Discerning between true and false spirituality had become a real problem for Cloverleaf COGOP, as the spirituality of Wicca was practiced openly in this community. The Pentecostal spirituality within the church was contaminated by religious false teachings. The Holy Spirit is believed to give life to others, and transform our

⁵ Center for Biblical Leadership, *Foundations: Church of God of Prophecy, History and Doctrine* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1998) 19-20.

⁶ Center for Biblical Leadership, *Foundations*, 48-49.

⁷ Elizabeth Sculthorp, *His Power is Greater: An autobiography of S. A. Cabales*, 6.

community, but the life-giving agent had lost its own. Spiritual life in this local congregation had become dependent on conforming to the governing rules for the sake of unity in the body.

The desire for Biblical Christian unity, and the exclusivity mindset began to move this organization toward a centralized government. A General Assembly became necessary to adopt guidelines and rulings needed to bring about a unified church.

Centralized Government

“Little by little, the General Assembly became authoritative and from it developed a hierarchy of episcopal authority over the churches. . . .

By 1912 Tomlinson began to see the office of General Overseer as being above the apostolic office, which he thought he found in James, the Lord's brother. He maintained that this particular James was not an apostle but above them in a solitary office that antityped Moses' position in Israel, and that filled Christ's place in the church on earth until He returned.”⁸

“The term ‘theocracy’ had been used throughout church history to describe a government that proclaimed the annual general assembly to be the highest tribunal. . . . Under this form of government, the general overseer appoints state and national overseers, who in turn appoint their staff and pastors, who in turn determine the local leaders.”⁹ Through this ecclesiastical structure, all doctrinal beliefs, practices, and behaviors impacted the life and ministry at every level.

⁸ Center for Biblical Leadership, *Foundations: Church of God of Prophecy, History and Doctrine* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1998) 16, 24.

⁹ H. D. Hunter, "Church of God of Prophecy," in *New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*. ed. Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. Van Der Maas, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002, 2003) 541.

It is significantly noted in our history that between 1923-1958 no emphasis on higher education was evident. “Formal education was generally considered dangerous or else a waste of time . . . students were taught to parrot established doctrine and practices. This stifled intellectual development, and rubber-stamped the next generation of leaders.”¹⁰ The members with a defective education relied on the integrity of those in authoritative positions for learning doctrinal beliefs, practices, and traditional behaviors. Those whose spiritual formation developed during this historical period learned to submit to the rulings approved by the “highest tribunal authority” without question.

Beginning the Uncharted Journey

A two-week assignment was agreed upon to determine available options for the remaining membership, and resources. That short time frame stretched into six months, and then expanded into another five years of spiritual adventure of trying to be “salt and light” to the people. The valuable lessons learned on this uncharted journey are shared for the benefit of my peers in Christian ministries that are struggling to survive, and a generation of emerging leaders called to serve in Christ's Kingdom.

The most visible issues encountered in this particular community were poverty, violent crime, prostitution, and drugs, which were generally typical of densely populated, low-income areas. However, they are only indicative of the underlying spiritual forces which manifested in recognized religious orders such as Wicca. This cultural reality could not be ignored if the church hoped to be “salt and light” in such a dark community.

¹⁰ Center for Biblical Leadership, *Foundations: Church of God of Prophecy, History and Doctrine* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House, 1998) 62-63.

Impossible Situation - Divine Intervention

Making an honest unbiased assessment of this situation proved to be a task beyond myself. Only Divine guidance could resolve the overwhelming issues that threatened to silence the voice of salvation to a community in dire need of it. After the initial few days of observation, and discussions with all involved, the challenges appeared insurmountable, both numerically, and financially. Christian ministry survival seemed impossible during that first year and disbanding the Cloverleaf COGOP was imminent without Divine intervention. Whatever the reasons were for the silent exodus from this local church was in the past, the present concern was for those who had remained faithful, and what resources were left. The physical property would be the most apparent, and logical place to begin an assessment. Not as apparent, were cultural gaps that prevented the congregation from engaging with the community. The church was uncomfortable when a stranger walked into a service, and the stranger was uncomfortable because the church message did not relate to his reality of life. The immediate problems would have to be identified and dealt with before effective ministry could be achieved. An earnest assessment began on the first Sunday in January 2012, with an understanding that my oversight responsibilities would be short-term.

Facing the Giants

Walking into an empty church building that had been once alive with activity, was simultaneously sad, and challenging. I imagined the dedicated volunteerism, many hours of donated manpower, fundraising efforts, and sacrificial giving required to establish this place of worship. My spirit was saddened by the thought of many laborers overcoming

the difficulties of building this facility. The sanctuary easily seated 150-200 adults comfortably, and I admired the high wooden ceiling. An assessment of the physical property, human resources, and financial support warranted closure for any natural business, but this was a Spiritual house. Furthermore, the remaining members were not ready to give up easily and voiced a strong desire to be an effective Christian ministry once again. This desire moved the primary focus from disbanding the church to community impact, which would require significant changes in traditional services. The obvious surface problems were simply a lack of attendance, and insufficient financial resources resulting from unwise choices. A deeper inquiry revealed strong cultural influences both within the church, and the surrounding community. These differences were not so easily detected, and could not be resolved within a few weeks since a culture develops over long periods of time and include: customary beliefs; social forms of behavior that depend on the capacity for learning, and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations; shared attitudes, goals, and practices.¹¹ Cloverleaf's culture presented many challenges for this local congregation.

SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES IN THE CLOVERLEAF COMMUNITY

Rapid Cultural Change

The Cloverleaf COGOP had been established in a community that began as a railroad station north of Interstate Highway 10 between Channelview and Jacinto City. It was an unnamed community in 1936, and the city is still an unincorporated, densely populated area geographically located on the outskirts of Houston, Texas. By 1990,

¹¹ *Merriam-Webster Online*, s.v. "Culture," accessed September 16, 2017, [http:// www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture).

Cloverleaf had eighteen churches, and a population of 18,230 with 47.4% of the people living in the city being Hispanic.¹²

“Historically a white community, Cloverleaf today is predominantly Hispanic. This trend began in the 1980s, but significantly accelerated in the 1990s, with the Hispanic population surpassing the white population sometime in the mid-1990s.”¹³ Currently, the largest racial/ethnic group is Hispanic at 73.9%.¹⁴ Cloverleaf has also seen a dramatic population density increase over the last decade.

Densely Populated

Overcrowded conditions are most visible in the housing, where one residential lot may contain three to five housing units on a single water and sewer source. The number one complaint of most Cloverleaf residents is an aging and insufficient infrastructure. As of July 1, 2017, a population of 25,057 live within a 3.31 square mile area. In 1980, the population density was less than 5,000 people per square mile, now it is greater than 6,600 people per square mile.¹⁵ High crime typically exists in densely populated, and impoverished areas.

Crime in the Community

In spite of the fact that more than fifty percent of the population in Cloverleaf claim to be Christian,¹⁶ the overall crime rate is higher than the national average.

¹² *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. "Cloverleaf, TX," by Diana J. Kleiner, accessed September 16, 2017, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hrchk>.

¹³ "Cloverleaf Community Plan, 2004," Harris County Community Services, accessed September 29, 2017, <https://csd.harriscountytexas.gov/Pages/Cloverleaf.aspx>, 11.

¹⁴ "Cloverleaf," Texas Demographics, accessed September 27, 2017, <https://www.texas-demographics.com/cloverleaf-demographics>.

¹⁵ Harris County, "Cloverleaf Community Plan," 10.

¹⁶ "Religion Statistics for Cloverleaf CDP," City Data, last modified 2012, accessed September 29, 2017, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Cloverleaf-Texas.html>.

Statistically, this is a dangerously violent culture in which the local church attempted to share God's love and peace. The crime rates for violent, and property crime are higher than the U.S. National average. Violent crime includes murder, manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. Property crime includes burglary, larceny-theft, and arson. Both of these crime rates increase by eleven percent from year to year. In Cloverleaf, you have a one in twenty-five chance of becoming a victim of any crime,¹⁷ and churches were not exempt from being victimized. A strained relationship between Houston law enforcers and Cloverleaf residents existed because of the high visibility issues connected with poverty, violent crime, prostitution, drugs, and religious cultic activity. This cultural reality could not be ignored because the homeless and prostitutes had faces that walked by the church daily, and the parking lot was used regularly for drug dealing in broad daylight. Within a short period of time, two of my personal keyboards were stolen, the front glass door broken, three window air-conditioners were taken, and a squatter tried to take possession of the parsonage. For safety purposes, doors were locked during Bible studies conducted after dark. However, locked doors, motion lights, and burglar alarms did not stop those determined to commit crime.

Property Protection - Police Involvement

Maintaining, and protecting the church property within a high-crime community demanded constant surveillance. Most of the people visiting church services were ex-convicts, prostitutes, homeless, and drug-users who were looking for a handout or scoping out the place. The difficulties of this task increased because of the distance

¹⁷ "Cloverleaf, TX Crime," Areavibes, last modified 2016, accessed September 27, 2017, <http://www.areavibes.com/cloverleaf-tx/crime/>.

between my primary residence and the parsonage. These problems connected with property security were suppressed while the buildings were occupied, but total occupancy was not in the best interest of the membership of the church. Law enforcement officers reacted negatively when called to perform their duties in this area because of the violent issues, and the number of break-ins reported. Emergency calls were so frequent, it became “normal” to see policemen on duty parked on the church property.

Because of my spiritually “sheltered life” background, it took a converted felon to indoctrinate me about criminal activity conducted around the property. It also took an ex-convict to show how the criminal mind uses the legal system to their advantage, ironically called J.C. This was such an impactful experience that an eviction summary was written, and placed on record as a learning experience for alternate ways of serving others. In an effort by the church to reach out to those in need, the parsonage was used to distribute clothing and food. Since the bedrooms were unoccupied at that time, J.C. was allowed to stay temporarily in one of the rooms as a kind gesture of the church members. This gesture allowed him the time to find a job and a permanent residence. He was admonished to refrain from any activity or behavior that was against the rulings of the church. After a couple weeks, it was apparent that J.C. had no respect for the church membership, its rulings, or the premises. The police had to be called on numerous occasions during the months it took to evict him. When confronted by the pastor, he insisted that the parsonage was “his house,” and he would fight to keep it. The fight was on, but the church was unprepared for it because the laws of eviction were favorable towards the one being evicted, not the owner of the property. In fact, the church was required by law to keep all the utilities operating and pay the bills.

On Sunday, October 7, 2012, a determination was made to serve an eviction notice which required police presence, but the policeman suggested we go to the courthouse and do it right. Legally, J.C. was to be given a thirty-day notice, which he was given the next day. Nothing more could be done until the expiration date.

On November 7, 2012, we filed for a court day which was scheduled for 9:00 a.m. Wednesday, November 28, 2012. The judge ruled for J.C. to vacate no later than December 3, 2012 as he failed to appear before the court. This case was closed as far as the church was concerned, but the battle for use of the parsonage was not over. In order to make life difficult, J.C. had changed the front door lock, barred other entrances, and trashed the whole house. Police involvement was called for once again, this time to confirm suspicion of drug activity.

What began as a generous attempt to share the love of Christ turned into several months of on-the-job (OJT) legal training, and a day in court costing \$101.00. The legal battle covered the better part of my first year as pastor of the Cloverleaf COGOP, which required an extended stay. This experience proved to be invaluable training for working with law enforcement in preventing other social problems.

Housing - Homeless and Hopeless

Being in an unincorporated area meant fewer regulations placed on housing and living conditions. Run-down trailers were parked wherever space permitted which overloaded the sewage and drainage systems. Empty buildings became places for prostitution activity, and drug dealers. The homeless slept under the I-10 underpasses, and in a wooded area just blocks away from the church without adequate shelter, food, water, and

bathing facilities. Looking through the glass front doors of the church, a garbage dump was visibly growing across the street which covered the half block of abandoned land. The ever-mounting garbage attracted disease-carrying animals such as, large rats, raccoon, and possum. Some of these animals somehow made their way into the church attic and had to be trapped. Large empty truck trailers were used by the homeless for shelter, and prostitutes frequented their use for business. This was the environment that was viewed by all who walked through the church doors. The general attitude was that since it was not church property, it was not our concern, and nothing could be done about it. So my attention turned back to something I could do something about.

SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES WITHIN THE CHURCH

Creating a Welcoming Environment

Many years ago, a very wise woman gave some advice to the younger women on how to clean house quickly when expecting guests. Her instructions were: Start at the front door; walk through the rooms that your guests will be; look at everything they will see; clean as you go; and change what you do not like. This advice has worked well for every home and the three churches to which I was assigned. The “clean as you go” would be time-consuming, but fairly easy to accomplish in this facility that housed a sanctuary, kitchen, pantry, and a couple of classrooms. But, the very idea of changing what I did not like was bound to be a huge challenge. Every room needed some sort of renovation, and new paint. Some of my personal trivial dislikes could be tolerated, such as a dark purple wall in sanctuary, and extra pews stored wherever they fit. However, there is one room that is a definite requirement for my way of doing ministry, it is an operating kitchen with

a place to distribute food for fellowship, and the hungry. At this critical junction, the kitchen needed a complete renovation. No activity of significant value had been conducted for months, so that even the hot water heater had been turned off.

An inquiry into a vacant piece of land located between the parsonage and neighbors house revealed that property also belonged to the church. It was brought to my attention when our neighbor asked permission for its use to hold a big party. The property was overgrown with weeds, which was a perfect habitat for small animals, and snakes. This assignment continued to grow bigger by the day.

Renovations on the two existing buildings would require an enormous amount of man hours and financial resources over and above maintenance costs. The threat of disbanding the church still over-shadowed the hope of effecting changes in a community desperately in need of a Savior. Even if by some miracle financial resources were made available for the physical property, cultural gaps between the church and community remained. An honest self-assessment was necessary to begin building bridges. We could have tried to build a wall against these problems, and seek safety behind locked doors, but the problems were still there. They are only indicative of the underlying spiritual forces that challenge the whole of Christianity. Therefore, drastic changes were necessary beginning within ourselves, and our own church culture.

A transition from closing down a local ministry to developing a cross-cultural church meant making very hard decisions resulting in some difficult changes in ministry practice. A critical shift was required in regularly scheduled services, from self-serving activities to engaging with the community. Years of habitual activity needed to be examined, and redirected. This shift involved changing the mindset of elderly members

who had faithfully kept the church doors open, and were nearing their end of life. Changing traditions at this point needed to be handled with extreme care because of a strong embedded belief that deviating from church traditions equaled the sin of disobedience. Conflict among this group was inevitable if needed changes were to materialize.

Cultural Beliefs that Influences the Church

At the time of my assignment, traditional activity in the Cloverleaf COGOP consisted of irregular general services, and a Sunday School class taught by a member who had been attending that local church since 1952. The curriculum had been approved by the General Assembly years ago, and the Teacher's Quarterly continued to be the primary resource. There was no logical reason for changing this long-standing tradition, except for the decline in attendance.

This local church was organized under the COGOP governance, and the rulings of the General Assemblies continued to be applicable to the membership. The spiritual formation of the remaining members included a strong belief that attending a Sunday School class every week equaled obedience to God. A self-assessment of the services revealed the extent of influence, and the impact that certain rulings had on a local church ministry. For example, the shared belief for conducting Sunday School was based on a “governing rule” by the Assembly of 1906 which reads:

“The Sunday school was discussed and this important service was highly favored . . . the assembly, therefore, recommends, advises, and urges every local church to have a Sunday school every Sunday during the whole year if possible. The Sunday school as a help to the Church is designated to accomplish four vital concerns: 1) to bring sinners to the saving knowledge

of Christ; 2) nurture the saints into spiritual maturity; 3) edify the Church and 4) elevate the morals of a community.”¹⁸

The General Assembly was considered to be "the supreme voice of authority in the Church of God" during that same era.¹⁹ This helped formulate the belief that if the Assembly was favorable to having Sunday School every Sunday, that the local church should submit and obey. For this congregation, obedience to the Assembly translated as Sunday School attendance equaled faithfulness to God. One hundred years later, this ruling continues to impact cultural beliefs, and ministry methods. The problem here was the importance placed on conducting a weekly Sunday School class without a full understanding of its original goals. Using the same curriculum was intended to keep local churches teaching the same topic, even if the subject matter may not have been relative to the students in attendance. According to the Assembly, the ideal intended goals for conducting a Bible study every Sunday of the year were to teach sinners about the Savior, mature the saints, lift up the Church, and change the community. Lifting up the church was easy, but the last goal of making changes in the community is the most problematic for a homogeneous church. There stands a real challenge in elevating the morals of the Cloverleaf community. The Sunday School class continued to be held every week because of an old tradition, but had lost sight of the goals for which it was established. Moral changes in the societies in which the church exists is the goal for an effective Sunday School. The results desired are that sinners are saved, that Christians would grow up and mature, and the Church would be a light in their community.

¹⁸ James Stone, *The Church of God of Prophecy: History & Polity* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House and Press, 1977), 172.

¹⁹ James Stone, *The Church of God of Prophecy: History & Polity* (Cleveland, TN: White Wing Publishing House and Press, 1977), 134.

The Builder generation, born before 1946, held fast to traditions, and stuck with the Cloverleaf COGOP through good and bad times. Two of the remaining members were part of this Builder generation who had kept the church doors open.

Summary

The Cloverleaf church culture had developed over decades of history within this congregation without significant change in its cultural ethos. Meanwhile, the demographical changes for the community showed rapid development of a multi-cultural society. Organizational traditions, rulings greatly influenced the ministerial praxis of this local congregation through its centralized government.

Historically, all general services were conducted in English during the developmental years of Cloverleaf COGOP in the 1940s. Language was an insignificant issue at that time since English was also the primary language of those in the community. It became a problematic issue when Cloverleaf trends showed consistent Hispanic increases with numbers currently reaching nearly three-fourths of its population by 2015.²⁰ Rapid growth resulted in a densely populated area with diverse ethnic groups bringing their own cultures with them. The challenges of language, spirituality, beliefs, and behavior were so many that divine intervention was needed to revive the congregation's spiritual life. My places of ministry have opened avenues of opportunity to observe that declining Pentecostal churches is not an isolated problem.

Proclaiming the “good news of the Kingdom” lies at the heart of everything Jesus said and did, and was intended to reach all the peoples of the earth. The physical needs in community must be addressed as well as the spiritual needs. Fee states, “What is

²⁰ "Cloverleaf, Texas," City-Data, last modified March 2016, accessed March 7, 2017, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Cloverleaf-Texas.html#b>.

significant for our present concern are two items: First our gospel is not simply that of “saving souls,” it is rather, as with Jesus, the bringing of wholeness to broken people in every kind of distress. Mission simply cannot be divided between “spiritual” and “physical.” To do one is to do the other, and both constitute the global mission of the church.”²¹ The fact remains, this local church did not close in 2012. Instead, it has become a life-changing experience, and we are still on the adventurous spiritual journey.

²¹ Gordon D. Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 16-17.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

FACING PRESENT REALITY WITH RESPECT FOR THE PAST

Introduction

A plethora of questions emerged at the Cloverleaf “cross-roads” in determining whether or not this struggling congregation could carry out its Christ-centered mission. Basic questions such as: Would more people benefit by keeping this church open, or by closing it down? With limited human resources, and insufficient financial support, why not sell the property, and invest into another ministry bearing Kingdom fruit? Revitalization would demand an exorbitant amount of time, energy, and resources which previously had not been required of the membership. Would this congregation willingly offer these sacrifices, and make the necessary changes? Imminent closure was certain without a major paradigm shift in the church culture. Clifford Geertz describes culture as “. . . a self-contained ‘super organic’ reality with forces and purposes of its own . . . located in the minds and hearts of men, and consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members.”¹ Therefore, making cultural changes required an honest self-evaluation of deep-seated traditional habits, customary beliefs, ministerial praxis, and basic ecclesial perceptions enforced by its centralized government.

The Cloverleaf COGOP was at a crucial turning point, and the ramifications of a paradigm shift would not be experienced in isolation because of its structural connections. I embraced their concern cautiously having faced similar circumstances

¹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 11.

twice before when causal “ripples” of change made by the General Assembly effected fundamental changes in local ministry ethos. Undoubtedly, other COGOP ministries would be affected by the choices of this local congregation due to its larger organizational infrastructure.

Feeling the Effects of Structural Change

It was during my first pastorate in Kingsville, Texas when news reached the field: After forty-six years of serving, our General Overseer, M. A. Tomlinson, willingly “passed the mantle of this sacred office” because of his failing health. This action conflicted with an entrenched customary belief that he would remain in office for life. In his book entitled, *The Turning Point That Changed Everything*, Dr. Wallace Pratt describes the event as an unexpected “reversal of circumstances.” The International Presbytery of our church was called to meet with the General Overseer in early 1990, and Dr. Pratt expresses his sentiments regarding the event as follows:

I could feel and see the life was returning; waiting now became easier, but the turning was still a struggle to come. Legalism, institutionalism, and autocracy had entrenched itself so strongly in our heritage that breaking it fully would require great effort, sacrifice, and losses. No single person could do it, but no single person would be exempt from the struggle. If spiritual life lay ahead, we must recognize that going in the same direction is not always going in the right direction.²

These sentiments reverberated globally, and became the reality for my local church in Kingsville then, again in Bacliff years later, and once more in Cloverleaf. Each of these congregations attempted to make the turn effected by dramatic changes which were initiated at the International level.

² Wallace R. Pratt, *The Turning Point That Changed Everything: Choosing to accept the unpredictable*, (USA: Xulon Press, 2009), 45.

This Ecclesial body had experienced a “slow slide into legalism and institutionalism” and the resulting bureaucracy had left many local churches little more than dying and dwindling “piggy banks.”³ However, in the early 1990s, the International Assembly sought to reverse the downward spiral with intentional steps toward systemic change and revitalizing the local churches. Tensions created throughout the implementation process confirmed how deeply the “Builders Generation” was entrenched in our heritage. Although critical decisions intended for global Ecclesial revitalization were passed by the Assembly, the reality was that many local congregations like this one, remained unmoved or unaware of the monumental turn-around. Our Christ-centered mission of being “salt and light” required an intentional “turning from” that which resulted in this downward spiral, and a “turning to” the life-giving source.

Mark DeYmaz states:

To revitalize a homogeneous church around the multi-ethnic vision will require dependence upon the Holy Spirit at a level you may not yet have experienced in ministry. . . . this calling requires a unique reliance upon the Lord in seeking to accomplish something that is otherwise unattainable apart from his involvement.⁴

Divine intervention was being experienced, and a renewed focus on the Holy Spirit initiated the long overdue turn-around. Despite existing adverse circumstances, corporate decisions were made to break free from the traditional “forces of legalism, institutionalism, and autocracy” at every organizational level.

In order to accomplish the mission for which the COGOP Cloverleaf was established, several issues were addressed in the general areas of: Pentecostal Spirituality; Engaging with the Cultures; and Thinking Globally Beyond the “Box.” For

³ Pratt, *Turning Point That Changed Everything*, 50-53.

⁴ Mark DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church: Mandate, Commitment, and Practices of a Diverse Congregation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 152.

this Pentecostal group, an honest self-evaluation revealed difficulty in differentiating the true from false spirituality. Their spirituality was largely informed by mirroring traditional church activity and reading about the Biblical manifestations of the Holy Spirit. Meanwhile, the cultural changes in the community continued to challenge the “holiness message” of the church with migrating animistic beliefs infiltrating their spirituality. The challenge of engaging with various cultures is a global concern, and this issue was addressed by the Biblical Doctrine and Polity Committee in its “Statement for Affirmation to the 98th International Assembly” in 2014.

“The Pursuit of the Holy God: Answering the Call of the Holy Spirit”

One of the tensions that exist within the Holiness movement is recognizing the influence of culture while maintaining the integrity of the message of holiness. Undoubtedly, the holiness message will intersect with culture because humans are beings that are shaped within a particular cultural context. The challenge is how to mediate the holiness message in ways that are relevant while at the same time not losing the integrity of the message. One of the questions we must ask is, “How do we engage cultures and subcultures in ways that are relevant and that embody the power of the holiness message to achieve transformation of lives?” Similarly, we must ask, “What would holiness look like for a church in different socio-economic and political contexts as well as in other cultures who accept the message of the gospel?”⁵

A story of a seventeenth-century woman named Kimpa Vita portrays how culture affects Christianity. She was baptized by Italian missionaries in the Kingdom of Kongo, but was disturbed as the priests attacked traditional ritual societies and initiations. Being a medium to the Other World, or witch doctor, she received a vision in a dream from St Anthony about 1703 who warned her that the colonial churches were in error. Jesus was, in fact, a Black Kongolesse born in the Kongo capital of Sao Salvador. Her message

⁵ *“The Pursuit of the Holy God: Answering the Call of the Holy Spirit”*, Important Business Acts 98th International Assembly of the Church of God of Prophecy, July 2014, Orlando, FL, accessed January 12, 2018, <http://cogop.org/assembly/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2015/01/2014ba-BusinessActs.pdf>, 30-31.

was that African Christians needed to find their own way to God, even if that meant using traditional practices condemned by the white priests. Kimpa Vita came to identify herself with St. Anthony, “the restorer of the Kingdom of Kongo . . . the second God,” whose spirit possessed her.⁶ The idea that one could claim to be a Christian, and a witchdoctor simultaneously is not unusual.

The spiritual line between good and evil is very thin, and discernment required a higher level of dependency upon the Spirit of Truth to recognize the true from false spirituality. Much of the spiritual activity learned in other cultures opposed Biblical holiness which is foundational in ecclesial doctrine. Some of the spiritual activities that manifested strongly in the Cloverleaf community, and practiced by church family members were fortune-telling, transcendental meditation, and astral projection.

PENTECOSTAL SPIRITUALITY

Discerning the Pentecostal Spirituality of Cloverleaf

The effectiveness of Pentecostal ministerial praxis is influenced by the ability to discern “true spirituality” within the various cultures in which we serve. Difficulties in spiritual discernment for the COGOP congregation in Cloverleaf were due to the fundamental Trinitarian doctrine being contaminated by religious concepts of “Jesus only/oneness Pentecostal” clergy, and animistic beliefs. Defining the many aspects of “Pentecostalism” could not be given justice here, nor serve the purpose of this written work. It is a much broader term than “Pentecostal” which is limited to “speaking in

⁶ Phillip Jenkins, *The next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 57.

tongues” in the first-century church or the term “Charismatic” used by modern Classical Pentecostals. The broader definition of “Pentecostalism” includes Christian prophecy, healing, glossolalia, or any of the other spiritual gifts described in the Bible.⁷ It is multifaceted, including communication with the Divine God via dreams, visions, or trances.⁸ There is a distinctive emphasis on the person, work, and gifts of the Spirit. Pentecostal Spirituality is distinct in that not only did it involve integrating beliefs, practices, and affections, but was “bound up in the doctrines of sanctification and Spirit baptism” and measuring up to the fruits of the Spirit.⁹ Pentecostals are aware of the spiritual world, and the Cloverleaf COGOP had been comfortable with defective knowledge of the Holy Spirit, angels, Satan, and demons. A comparison of the two world views of Animism and Pentecostalism show striking similarities in the categories such as the spiritual world, blessings, healing, and revelation. Herein is the need for discernment in places such as the Cloverleaf area.

Animism is the belief, and the practices that go with that belief, that the world is full of spirits that can hurt us unless we are careful to appease them. The dangerous spirits need to be watched and kept happy. Animists believe in magic and the ability of at least certain people to convey power via curses, blessings, spells, and the like. Much of what God does and endorses looks on the surface like what animists do. The basic difference is not the presence or absence of power, but the source of that power.¹⁰

The complexity of spirituality simply stated is that without a belief in Christ, spirituality is recognized as evil spirits manifesting false religions.

⁷ Stanley M. Burgess, ed., *Christian Peoples of the Spirit: A Documentary History of Pentecostal Spirituality from the Early Church to the Present* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 4.

⁸ Hector Ortiz, “Spirituality of Global Pentecostalism” (lecture, Camp Boothe, Bessemer, AL, January 18-22, 2016).

⁹ Steven J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (Cleveland, TN: CPT, 2010), 118-120.

¹⁰ C. H. Kraft, “Spiritual Warfare: A Neocharismatic Perspective, Animism vs. God-given Authority,” in *New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*. ed. Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. Van Der Maas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002, 2003), 1092-93.

*"Religions without written scriptures and recorded histories often share common features, such as the belief in evil powers identified with sorcery and witchcraft, specialized healers, psychic events, and the importance of ancestors. Given the lack of written scriptures, . . . most grassroots religious movements are based on the religious experience of their founders and members . . . In such traditions the Shamans, or similar ritual figures, communicate between this world and the next, . . ."*¹¹

Both world views, and shared beliefs intensely informed my ministry through two significant cultures: Witchcraft was part of my ethnic family background connected with the spiritual culture in the Philippine Islands; and the Shamanistic beliefs manifested in Pentecostal spirituality were observed during several short-term mission trips to South Korea. These cultural connections allowed for spiritual awareness of similar beliefs within the religiosity in Cloverleaf.

Ancestral Influences That Impact Spirituality

My ecclesial culture formation began at birth in 1943, just a couple years after the Church of God message was introduced to my parents, Santos A. and Temotea Cabales. There was always a personal awareness of other-worldly spirits because of my father's involvement with witchcraft. His experience of receiving satanic power is shared in the following excerpt:

"One day in the year of 1937, a man came to see me. He talked to me about the Satanic power, and I readily accepted it. He instructed me to pray seven times a day to the idols; a similar ritual to a very prominent religious faith. I also was instructed to fast seven Fridays. After I had prayed and fasted according to his instructions a black form as of a big man came to me and laid his hand on my forehead. I felt as if cold water had been poured on me from my forehead down to the bottom of my feet. I felt so light. It seemed like I was floating through the air. Then I began to heal the sick through the power of the devil."¹²

¹¹ Terry C. Muck et al., eds. *Handbook of Religion: A Christian Engagement with Traditions, Teachings and Practices*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 347.

¹² Elizabeth Sculthorp, *His Power is Greater: An autobiography of S. A. Cabales*, 6.

This satanic power is an accepted lifestyle in which my father found personal pleasure, and benefit. This awareness of the spiritual world is similar to Pentecostal beliefs in the activities of the Holy Spirit, angels, Satan, and demons.¹³ The culture of his homeland allowed for a dual spirituality in Christianity as defined by Catholicism, and an active involvement with the animistic beliefs of the Philippine Islands.

Pre-Hispanic Filipino Religion in the Philippines

Religious similarities within the Cloverleaf area were made by a comparison with the familiar cultures that informed my own spirituality. Historically, Spanish accounts of pre-Hispanic Filipino religion is interpreted as “the work of the devil, whose influence and presence they felt tangibly.” All their method of government and religion is based on tradition and custom. These traditions were preserved in songs sung when working, celebrating, and “much more when weeping in mourning for the dead.” Their fables include the god who is Maker or Creator, and speak of the creation, beginning of the human race, a flood, reward of glory, punishment, and other invisible things. Like many other nations, their idolatry consists in adoring and considering as gods their ancestors, particularly outstanding men of valor. In memory of their ancestors, they have little idols, images, or statues - stone, straw, bone or ivory, a crocodile's tooth, or gold. Although they did not have any temples, they had priests, men and women, . . . This office was held by the one who had the best ability to deal with the devil, . . .¹⁴ In defining these types of

¹³ J. C. Ma, "Animism and Pentecostalism: Comparison Between Animistic and Pentecostal Beliefs," in *New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*. eds. Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. Van Der Maas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002, 2003), 317.

¹⁴ Klaus Koschorke et al., *A History of Christianity in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, 1450-1990: A Documentary Sourcebook* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2007), 588-616.

traditions, anthropologists have termed tribal religions such as the aforementioned Filipino religion as animistic. These traditions practiced in Filipino folklore were similar to the spirituality observed in South Korea during several short-term educational mission trips.

Pentecostal Spirituality in South Korea

“The Oral Shamanist Culture in Pentecostal Transformation”

This Shamanistic Culture has influenced my Pentecostal theology, and ministerial praxis more than any other. An educational mission involvement with South Korea exposed the Cloverleaf congregation to its unique spiritual culture, and increased ability for discernment. The oral tradition goes back to the year 2332 B.C., 1000 years before King David. . . . Since Korea has been influenced by China, it is not astonishing that the first main religions of Korea were Buddhism, and later Confucianism . . . the two religions were penetrated by Korean Shamanism. Protestant and Pentecostal versions, has borrowed much from Korean shamanism.¹⁵

Unlike the historiography of the Philippines where a single religion is dominant, Korean culture includes a wide variety of religious elements that have shaped the people's way of thinking and behavior. The diversity of cultural spirituality in this area of the world emphasizes the importance of spiritual discernment because . . .

Holism is key to Asian spirituality. No clear division separates between the visible and invisible worlds. Spiritual forces are feared rather than loved, placated and manipulated rather than adored. Spirits are served corporately at the village level, rather than either individually or nationally.¹⁶

¹⁵ Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 99-100.

¹⁶ Muck, *Handbook of Religion*, 244.

Dr. Boo-Woong Yoo divides the history of Korean Pentecostalism into three typical streams: Fundamentalist (1900 onward); mystical; and Minjung tradition (1970ff). The first Pentecostalism was a popular movement which worked through the shamanist forms of religion (characterized by the healing of the sick, visions, ecstasies, the priesthood of women, and lack of theological education). These forms were adapted in a Pentecostal way. These early Pentecostals took the biblical text at its face value and experienced deep revivals The shamanist forms of religion adapted to Pentecostal spirituality are seen within the Minjung Pentecostalism “which tries to interpret the Bible with the people”.

Korean Pentecostalism is not presented as a product of Western Pentecostal missionaries. That is why Korean Pentecostalism is very different. All founding pioneers are Koreans, who are deeply rooted in Korean popular culture and integrate this culture selectively in their spirituality . . . Yoo sees in shamanism “a faith for the masses. . . . most scholars agree that shamanism has been the central force shaping the development of Korean Pentecostalism.”¹⁷

This oral religion does not have a systematic structure, but permeates into the daily lives of the people through folklore and customs, much like pre-Hispanic religion in the Philippines. Since a division between the visible and invisible worlds are unclear, elements of shamanistic faith could be assimilated with Pentecostalism, and remain an underlying religion which negatively affect Christianity. This type of Pentecostalism similarly describes the spirituality manifested among Pentecostals in Cloverleaf.

Amos Yong, a leading advocate for participation in interreligious dialogue, claims that “the Holy Spirit may be at work within other religions in spite of the lack of an explicit confession of the lordship of Jesus Christ.” He encourages Pentecostals to develop a theology of religions because “the Spirit’s economy is not restricted to the Word’s economy.” Dr. Yong allows pneumatology (Holy Spirit) to inform soteriology

¹⁷ Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, 101-3.

(salvation through Christ), which would place Pentecostalism above the salvific work of the “cross” found in Scripture.¹⁸ This controversial view conflicts with the foundational belief that Christianity is not just another way of life, Christ is life. Therefore, discerning between what is of the Holy Spirit, and what is other-worldly becomes critical for Pentecostals, and can be summed up in this statement, “True spirituality administers life; pseudo-spirituality administers death.”¹⁹

ENGAGING WITH THE CULTURE

The animistic beliefs represented in Filipino and Korean cultures manifested within the spiritual culture of Cloverleaf. The need was for “a theology of church ministry that can inspire and direct the church’s moral engagement with society without diminishing the church’s historic commitment to evangelism.”

The Pentecost narrative is the story of the transfer of the charismatic Spirit from Jesus to the disciples . . . By this transfer of the Spirit, the disciples become the heirs and successors to the earthly charismatic ministry of Jesus; that is because Jesus has poured out the charismatic Spirit upon them the disciples will continue to do and teach those things which Jesus began to do and teach.²⁰

Bringing wholeness to broken people in every kind of distress is our mission. As mentioned before, proclaiming the good news lies at the heart of everything Jesus said

¹⁸ Christopher A. Stephenson, *Types of Pentecostal Theology: Critical Studies of the Major Theologians of Pentecostalism: Method, System, Spirit* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 83, 93, 110.

¹⁹ Hector Ortiz, *Spirituality of Global Pentecostalism* (Lecture, Camp Boothe, Bessemer, AL, January 18-22, 2016).

²⁰ Murray A. Dempster et al., eds., *Called and Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective*. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 22-23, 139.

and did, especially towards helping the “poor.” Our mission is concerned with “saving souls” and “bringing wholeness.” This is the global mission of the church.²¹

The Challenges of Systemic Change

Every Christian is challenged to be a “light in a very dark world, which may call them into not only living right, but making systemic social changes in established institutions. . . . one needs justice in addition to love to carry on what love starts but cannot finish alone. Love is the greater factor, but justice is a necessary instrument of love. . . . Justice carries out what love motivates.”²² The Cloverleaf congregation had become comfortable with the frequent injustices which evolved into acceptable characteristics for the surrounding community. According to public statistics, Cloverleaf crime estimates are known to be significantly higher than the national average in the areas of murder, rape, robbery, assault, and burglary. These characteristics highly conflicted with Biblical principles and challenged the motivation of those who had been called by Christ to share His love. It is easier to evangelize and disciple people who are ethnically, economically, and educationally similar to us than those who oppose. Therefore, a homogeneous church struggles with Jesus’ call “to cross national, ethnic, religious, economic, social, educational, and all other cultural barriers for the sake of the Gospel.”²³ The challenges are compounded in that Christ’s call involves engaging with some difficult issues which are beyond the natural realm. As Richard Niebuhr states:

Christ’s kingdom is not of this world; it is not a rule over external conditions, but over the spirits of men. . . . We are not dealing with human progress in culture, but with the divine conversion of the spirit of man

²¹ Dempster, *Called and Empowered*, 16-17.

²² Stephen Charles Mott, 2nd ed., *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 45.

²³ DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church*, 152, 161.

from which all culture rises. . . . The kingdom of God is transformed culture, because it is first of all the conversion of the human spirit from faithlessness and self-service to the knowledge and service of God.²⁴

Changing the external conditions of any community may be a good work, but these changes are only temporary without the human spirit being converted. When Christ rules over the spirit of man, the transformed life elevates morals which effects change in culture. This concept is one of the lofty goals for conducting a weekly Sunday School class which remains a traditionally strong “governing rule” within the Ecclesial system. The community culture had conditioned the church’s view on Scripture to believe that elevating morals in the community was not their primary concern. This mind-set allowed for an attitude of unconcern towards the multi-cultural people in Cloverleaf, who lived outside of their comfort zone. Church members had become comfortable with glorious religious rhetoric within the “spiritual family” that covered up the reality of a growing complacency. Other sincere members, but uninformed of important doctrinal issues, or polity changes, remained faithful to their own personal past experiences. However, as the community culture changed, and past memories became irrelevant to the present society, the transforming message of the Gospel seemed powerless in elevating cultural morals. As stated before, God's kingdom is transformed culture, because it converts the human spirit from faithlessness to service of God. The faithful members in the three COGOP congregations in which I served as pastor, professed a desire to serve in the Kingdom, but were ill-equipped for relating the “good news” message to people who most needed it.

In an essay by Gordon D. Fee, which is included in a book entitled, “Called and Empowered,” Christians are reminded that the good news of the kingdom was intended by God to bless “all the peoples on earth” (Gen 12:3). “The proclamation of the good

²⁴ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1956), 228.

news of the kingdom lies at the heart of everything Jesus said and did”, and specifically the poor, those who are helpless, defenseless, and also the impoverished in spirit. Fee states, “What is significant for our present concern are two items: First our gospel is not simply that of “saving souls”; it is rather, as with Jesus, the bringing of wholeness to broken people in every kind of distress. Mission simply cannot be divided between “spiritual” and “physical”. To do one is to do the other, and both constitute the global mission of the church.”²⁵ This perspective on mission has been a focal concern for ministry in the context of the local church. The physical needs in community must be addressed as well as the spiritual needs, but the message of Christ has been weakened because “works” do not match “faith” in those carrying the message.

Sending Missionaries into the Community

In his thought-provoking book entitled, “*The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone*,” author Samuel Escobar answers some important questions concerning missions. His expertise as the dean of Latin American Protestant Evangelical Missiologists makes this written work a valuable resource. Escobar states that “the heart of ‘mission’ is the drive to share the good news with all, to cross every border with the gospel”, and challenges those in Christian ministry to think globally. He presents the question for why the church exists, and answers it with:

Sharing the good news, going to "the other" with the message of Jesus Christ, inviting others to Jesus' great banquet, gives a focus and direction to all the other functions. Thus one can say that the church exists for mission and that a church that is only inward looking is not truly the church.²⁶

²⁵ Dempster, *Called and Empowered*, 16-17.

²⁶ Samuel Escobar, *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 13.

A church that is looking inward has lost sight of its mission, and may become so absorbed by their own needs that the needs of those to whom they were sent can no longer be seen.

Sharing the simplicity of “good news” is complicated by making the message relevant to cultures which are different than the church culture. Escobar writes, “Culture must always be tested and judged by Scripture.”

Because man is God's creature, some of its culture is rich in beauty and goodness. Because he is fallen all of it is tainted with sin and some of it is demonic. . . Missions have all too frequently exported with the Gospel an alien culture and churches have sometimes been in bondage to culture rather than to the Scripture. . . "conversion should not 'deculturize' the converts. They should remain members of their cultural community, and wherever possible retain the values that are not contrary to biblical revelation. In no case should the converts be forced to be 'converted' to the culture of the foreign missionary. . . If Jesus' incarnational pattern is taken seriously by missionaries today within the social and structural realities of our time and space, mission will not be done from a platform of power and privilege, nor will the gospel be watered down to make it palatable to the rich and powerful.²⁷

I firmly believe that Christ ought to be at the center of our missionary activity and should be the pattern for life. However, even our “church culture” and traditions can become idols, so while we hold on to our own culture and traditions, we ask the convert to give up theirs.

Within the first twelve months of being assigned to the Cloverleaf COGOP, the question was no longer whether or not the church should remain in operation. Instead, the important question was: Why did God place us here in this community, at this time, in such a city? How can we serve Him in the Houston, Texas metropolitan area? What is our mission, and to whom shall we minister? By asking ourselves these questions, and

²⁷ Escobar, *The New Global Mission*, 72, 106-7.

honestly searching for answers, we were made aware that historically, churches could become so identified with their own culture that the congregation loses the sense of mission. These circumstances became the reality from which the Cloverleaf COGOP desired to change and break free. A strong “bondage to culture rather than to the Scripture” was preventing relevancy of the Gospel to the diverse cultures. It was time to think globally because globalization had changed our culture, and the church needed cross-cultural missionaries within our own community. Moving from being a homogeneous church to cross-cultural evangelism, as Mark De Ymaz said, “. . . requires a unique reliance upon the Lord.” Therefore, leaders must first of all be followers of the Holy Spirit, and then be willing to follow Him outside the “box” of culture and traditions.

THINKING GLOBALLY BEYOND THE “BOX”

Lectures by Professor Ortiz regarding leadership have given impetus to ministerial praxis, and some of the valuable “nuggets” of knowledge are shared here to encourage emerging leaders to think globally. A leader always has a plan; however, the plan may not be in line with God’s. The reality is that man-kind is flawed and needs a Savior. Peter is an example of how desperately leaders need to be followers. He was one of the prime leaders in the early church but could not tell the difference between being used by God or used by Satan (Matt 16:22,23). It was only after Peter cursed, and found himself in trouble, that he remembered Jesus’ words, “follow me.” His problem was not his “leadership,” but his “followership.” We also have a calling, but it is primarily “followership” because our calling comes from God, not from “ecclesia.” Like Peter, we

are human and capable of breaking fellowship with God. Therefore, hearing internally, and intentionally what the Holy Spirit has to say is vitally important for leaders.

Holistic wellness is the good news message of the Kingdom of God. How do we take the message to people who need “holistic wellness”? What are the essentials of salvation? Some of what we call important has nothing to do with getting into heaven. Followership leaders cannot violate their conscience, they must be critical thinkers, with a passion for long range vision. God’s will is enacted by the Spirit, and renewal is what gets Pentecostalism out of the box.²⁸

A Calling within a Calling

The idea of having a calling within a calling is a real challenge for the critical thinkers and is a positive thing even though the tension between what is expected, and the call gets very tight. Oswald Sanders states, “spiritual leadership is not a calling we choose to pursue; it is a calling we choose to answer,” and if it were easy, anyone could do it. “Spiritual leadership requires Spirit-filled people,” and is indispensable regardless of how gifted, and skilled a person may be. The Holy Spirit does not take control of anyone against his or her will. When a leader is appointed, but not spiritually fit, his ministry results in an unspiritual administration. Since the Spirit's great purpose is missions, we in leadership should also be involved in where the Spirit is working. The author is explicit in declaring that the early Church leaders were sensitive to the Spirit, and His guidance even when being obedient meant leaving old traditions. The Holy Spirit is still moving among men, transforming, guiding, giving vision, and performing the miraculous in those

²⁸ Ortiz, H. (2017, January 16-20). Lecture presented in Global Pentecostalism/Pentecostal Leadership 1036, Gordon-Conwell University, South Hamilton, MA.

who are sensitive to Him. Leaders have been endowed with Spiritual gifts which are to be used to serve others in the Kingdom of God. We all have natural qualities that must be given over to the control of the Holy Spirit. Our natural qualities without the Spirit cannot bring about the desired Spiritual results. I am in full agreement with the author that “All real Christian service is but the expression of Spirit power through believers yielded to Him.”²⁹

Being a Spiritual leader as described by this author is most certainly impossible without a faithful commitment towards his/her calling. I believe every Christian must strive to overcome the many hindrances in fulfilling their individual call.

Making Disciples - Mentoring Leaders

Training others, mentoring, and making disciples is never easy, and quite costly. Sanders challenges leaders to “multiply themselves by growing younger leaders.” They should feel the weight of heavy burdens and must be trusted. Training new leaders requires “careful thought, wise planning, endless patience, and genuine Christian love. It cannot be haphazard, hurried, or ill conceived.” Jesus gave us an example when he spent three years training His disciples. Paul trained young Timothy and Titus both of whom became leaders worthy of mention in the Bible, and useful as examples for the Church in the 21st Century. One example given by Sanders in this book is Frank Buchman, founder of Moral Rearmament who claimed that if he failed to train others to do his work better than he did it, he had failed. For many years he worked to make himself dispensable.³⁰

²⁹ Sanders, Oswald. *Spiritual Leadership*, Chicago, IL: Moody Press. 2007, 77-80.

³⁰ Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*. 149-152.

According to Sanders, developing young people who can lead the church should take high priority.

Developing leaders has taken priority as one of my major goals because of an urgency for capable pastors who are qualified to fill existing churches. Leadership training requires patient, careful instruction and prayerful, personal guidance over a considerable time, and “they are produced one by one.” Within two years of ministry in the East Houston area, a very capable community outreach coordinator was trained and able to oversee a regular food distribution service to the homeless, and needy families in the Cloverleaf area. There is no greater reward for the cost of discipleship than to watch young ministers grow physically, and spiritually to become qualified spiritual leaders.

Globalization Has Come to Cloverleaf

The word “glocal” was added to my vocabulary by Dr. Ortiz in his lecture, “*Global Pentecostalism/Leadership*,” January 2017. It has become a new focal point in ministry because globalization has come to our local church, and there must be interaction between the cultures they bring, and the context in which we work. Creating the “alternative spaces for survival and development” is a great challenge for the Cloverleaf COGOP because engaging with the “global citizen,” and being a “glocal” church is more than operating an “ethnic church.”³¹

Summary

Doctrinal reversals within the global infrastructure of this Pentecostal Movement have consequently left spiritual “scars,” and emotional damage. But, Cloverleaf COGOP

³¹ Hector Ortiz, *Pentecostal Leadership* (Lecture, South Hamilton, MA, January 16-20, 2017).

is in the process of revitalization, and spiritual growth which comes through adhering to Scripture rather than culture. Pentecostal spirituality may have different faces within various cultures, but our mission is not to transform them. Our mission is to share Christ who transforms the spirit of man from which all culture rises.

The Cloverleaf COGOP vision has been refocused towards the multi-cultural community within its geographical area of concern, and ministries are currently operated in partnership with other like-minded organizations. The community outreach activities transcend cultural barriers in order to meet the immediate needs of the people. With a Biblical understanding of Christ's mandate of taking the "Good News" to all the peoples of the earth, barriers were overcome by practical ministry. Estranged people in the community began to receive the benefits of a society that desired to fulfill its established mission.

An outward focus enabled the Cloverleaf COGOP to find unique opportunities to minister to the needy, and partner with other organizations for the welfare of the people. One of these opportunities is an educational mission program that had been previously formed in partnership with South Korea and is a unique global connection for training emerging leaders in cross-cultural evangelism. The challenge for global Christianity is to sustain the intrinsic power of the gospel without ignoring cultural engagements nor violating the conscience. We have the Spirit of Truth who consistently guides and transforms the ecclesia culture of the Cloverleaf COGOP.

CHAPTER THREE: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

THE GOSPEL FOR ALL NATIONS

Introduction

Scripture reveals that God intended to bless “all peoples on earth’ through Abraham, the father of God's nation, and that His plan included anyone in the world” (Gen. 12:1-3, New International Version).¹ Jesus told his disciples, “. . . this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations” (Matt. 24:14). The Ecclesial global mission is simply stated as, “Go everywhere in the world. Tell the Good News to everyone,” and this mandate holds true in our contemporary world (Mark 16:15 ICB).

Old Testament prophets foretold the coming of Christ, the Messiah, and historical records show that He came as prophesied (Dan. 9:25-26, John 1:41, 4:25, Matt. 1:22). Jesus came to fulfill everything written about him in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms (Matt. 5:17, 21:4, Luke 18:31, Luke 24:27, 44). His enemies could do nothing to Jesus until the hour came for the “Messiah” to be crucified because all this was done, that the Scriptures might be fulfilled (Luke 22:53, Matt. 26:56). After the resurrection, Jesus opened the minds of His disciples, so they could understand the Scriptures, and be His witnesses. This is what is written:

The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:44-49).

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations and references are from the New International Version of the Bible.

The Bible confirms that, “. . . those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled” (Acts 3:18). Therefore, the “Good News” is that the salvific work of Christ is complete and offered to all “peoples, and nations” including those who have migrated into our own communities from other countries.

Qualifying Factor – “Holy Spirit”

Jesus' disciples were chosen to be eye-witnesses of Christ's death, and resurrection, which was to be preached to all nations. However, the effectiveness for this special calling depended on supernatural power from on high, so these spiritual leaders were instructed to stay in the city and wait for the Holy Spirit to guide them. Their natural ability, gifts, and skill would not be enough to meet the challenges ahead.

However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own *authority*, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare *it* to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore, I said that He will take of Mine and declare *it* to you (John 16:13-14).

Jesus commissioned his followers to “‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature,’ and the ‘Spirit of Truth’ was sent to guide them” (Mark 3:14; 16:15). Therefore, listening, and following the Holy Spirit is foundational to being Christ’s witnesses.

The Ecclesial mission needed to be revisited by the Cloverleaf COGOP because their “exclusive body ecclesiology” negated crossing cultural barriers. As the “Spirit of Truth” penetrated hearts, and His Word transformed minds, the focus of this homogeneous church was redirected towards engaging with the community. Scripture

transcended culture and initiated a gradual process of correcting the strong beliefs, societal norms, rulings, and traditions that had become problematic for cross-cultural evangelism, and community involvement. The words of Paul were acknowledged as he wrote to Timothy,

All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.
(2 Tim. 3:16-17 KJV)

God's written Word "breathed" new life into the Cloverleaf congregation and refocused the vision for: being effective spiritual witnesses of the Gospel; doing practical Christian ministry; seeking the peace and prosperity of the city; and connecting with others in the Kingdom globally. This renewed vision changed hopelessness, and fear to expectancy, and purpose.

SPIRITUAL WITNESSES OF THE GOSPEL

It is significant to note that the followers of Jesus were not exempt from fear, doubt and hopelessness. A Biblical account that addressed these timeless emotional struggles occurred three days after the disciples had witnessed the crucifixion of their Master. In summary: On the third day after Jesus was crucified, two of Christ's followers walked on the road toward Emmaus which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking about everything that had happened when Jesus joined them, but they were kept from recognizing him. They had hoped that Jesus was the "Redeemer of Israel," but hope was gone. Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, Jesus explained the Scriptures concerning himself. The promised Messiah was right there walking and talking with them, yet they were discouraged, and defeated.

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:13-32).

Hopelessness disappeared when they recognized the “risen Savior” through a clear understanding of Scripture. The exciting news needed to be shared immediately, and they hurried back to tell their friends, “It is true! The Lord has risen.”

Hope deferred makes the heart sick, But <i>when</i> the desire comes, <i>it is</i> a tree of life. (Prov 13:12 NKJV)

That event aptly described the emotional struggles felt among the members who faced an immediate crisis. The “Good News” is that we have a risen Lord who promises,

If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; (John 14:15-18 NIV).

The ecclesial ethos in Cloverleaf needed a paradigm shift in order for the people to be effective witnesses.

Practicing the Gospel Within the Church

The Bible gives a model for taking care of church business that serves well in building up the local congregations and sharing the Gospel. This passage is the Biblical basis for developing the outreach initiatives within each area of my ministry. The job descriptions require unified working relationships that are designed to demonstrate the

Gospel of peace in community. The Apostle Paul writes to the saints at Ephesus that Christ . . .

. . . gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. . . . speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work (Ephes. 4:11-16).

By us applying this passage to Cloverleaf, we acknowledged that Jesus Christ is in full charge as the Head, and He is to be obeyed. Those called to fill the offices have been given responsibility to "prepare God's people for works of service." Each one has a work and everyone shares in the foundational mission of "telling the Good News" to everyone by functioning within their individual gifts, talents, and skills. Speaking the truth in love is foundational to growing up in Christ, and combined with each part working in harmony, the body of Christ is built up. According to this passage, the human resources for sharing the Gospel was provided through a five-fold ministry: Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. My responsibility as pastor/teacher of the Cloverleaf COGOP was to equip the saints to serve in the community, to mentor new leaders, instruct the people, train workers, and support the ministries as they developed. Practicing the Gospel within this church culture would serve to demonstrate the salvific work of Christ and eliminate cultural barriers. "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, . . ." (Matt. 24:14).

PRACTICAL CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

God's people have dealt with different cultures from the time of Abraham who was called to leave his own country, and the people of Mesopotamia to form a new nation (Gen. 12:1, Acts 7:1). The Bible records cultural tensions that resulted in great persecution of the early church. It was in the context of the Christian community during a time of growth, that necessitated the appointment of seven deacons to be responsible for the church's "food distribution" program (Acts 6:1).

For a long period a feeling of mutual jealousy had existed between the "Hebrews," or Jews proper, who spoke the sacred language of Palestine, and the "Hellenists," or Jews of the Grecian speech, who had adopted the Grecian language, and read the Septuagint version of the Bible instead of the Hebrew. This jealousy early appeared in the Christian community. It was alleged by the Hellenists that their widows were overlooked in the daily distribution of alms. . . . seven men of good report, full of the Holy Spirit, and men of practical wisdom, who should take entire charge of this distribution. . . . Seven men were chosen, who appear from their names to have been Hellenists.²

One of the seven, called Stephen, was also an evangelist, "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; . . . who did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people."

Some members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen began to argue with Stephen but could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke. Stephen was standing before religious cultures that were about to stone him. Yet, he would not let the powerful Sanhedrin stop him from speaking the truth concerning Christ. His lengthy speech summarized the entire history of Israel (Acts 7).

Abraham moved from the Chaldean culture to a strange multi-cultural land that his descendants were going to occupy. Many years later, the children of Israel had to

² M. G. Easton M.A., D.D., "*Deacon*," in *Easton's Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed., (Thomas Nelson, 1897) QuickVerse 2011.

interact with the culture of Egypt. Jealousy caused the patriarchs to sell their brother, but the culture of Egypt did not prevent Joseph from worshipping God. He became ruler within the Egyptian culture, but after his death the same culture enslaved and mistreated Abraham's descendants for four hundred years. Then Moses was born to deliver the children of Israel. He was ethnically Jewish, raised by Egyptian royalty, educated in the Egyptian culture, lived forty years in Midian as a foreigner, and spent the rest of his life in the desert with a rebellious, and disobedient people (Heb 3:16-18). Because of Israel's sins, God raised up the Babylonians, and they lived with that pagan culture for seventy years (Acts 6:5, 8-12; 7).

SEEK THE PEACE AND PROSPERITY OF THE CITY

Can a city like Cloverleaf be saved? Is there hope for a community where the norm is poverty, violent crime, prostitution, and drugs? Where does a homogeneous church even begin to engage with the “peoples” in a multi-cultural community who are multi-ethnic, and multi-linguistic whose culture significantly opposes the salvific message. It was within the arena of practical ministry that presented the greatest challenge for a congregation with limited human resources, financial support, and defective education. A starting point came through the prophet, Jeremiah, whom God had singled out to be His spokesman to Israel and appointed to be “a prophet to the nations.” He was called to the prophetic ministry during King Josiah's reign in 626 B.C., and continued his ministry until after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. He spoke our own fears by saying, “I do not know how . . . ,” to which God declared, “Do not be afraid . . . I am with you to deliver you” (Jer. 1:5-8 NASB). The Cloverleaf COGOP did not

know how to relate to the diverse cultures, but was encouraged by the fact that God will be with those He sends. One of His instructions to Jeremiah was, “Go up and down the streets of Jerusalem, . . . If you can find but one person who deals honestly and seeks the truth, I will forgive this city” (Jer. 5:1). The principle of this verse is applicable to present-day cities. God wills to forgive and is looking for an honest person who is sincerely seeking the truth. If Jeremiah had found one such person, God would have forgiven the ancient city of Jerusalem. According to the prophetic word, Jerusalem's destruction was close at hand, and Jeremiah wept over their spiritual decline.³ The nation of Israel was once “holy to the LORD” but had strayed away from God by following “worthless idols.” They were led through the barren wilderness, and brought into a fertile land which they defiled. Even the priests forgot God, they did not ask, ‘Where is the LORD?’ Their leaders rebelled against Him, and the prophets followed after Baal. Israel sinned by forsaking the LORD, saying, ‘I will not serve you.’ They prostituted themselves with worthless idols, and said, ‘We are free to roam; we will come to you (God) no more.’ . . . ‘I am innocent.’ . . . But God said, “I will pass judgment on you because you say, ‘I have not sinned’” (Jer. 2:3-7, 13, 20, 30-35). The spiritual condition of Jerusalem in the 6th century noticeably resembles the spiritual decline of numerous 21st century cities, including Cloverleaf.

The LORD told Jeremiah “‘speak to all the people of the towns of Judah . . . Tell them everything I command you; do not omit a word! Perhaps they will listen and each will turn from his evil way. Then I will relent and not bring on them the disaster I was planning because of the evil they have done.’ But even though God sent prophets ‘again

³ J. D. Douglas, ed., *"Jeremiah," in Old Testament Volume, New Commentary on the Whole Bible, Introduction to the Prophetical Books* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1990) QuickVerse 2011.

and again,' the people did not listen. The consequence was that 'this city will be made an object of cursing among all the nations of the earth'" (Jer. 26:2-3, 5-6). Jeremiah was willing to face death for speaking the Word of the LORD, but the people still refused to obey, and were taken into Babylon. The intended purpose was for their good, because they needed a change of heart, and God says, "I will give them an heart to know me, that I *am* the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart" (Jer. 24:1-7).

Seek the Peace of Cloverleaf

The conditions for the Cloverleaf COGOP were as hopeless as the people of God who were now living in a strange land with a foreign culture ruling over them, and some of their own prophets gave them false hope of returning back home soon. This false hope prevented them from prospering in Babylon, and experiencing "the good" intended for them while they lived there. God had a plan to prosper his people, but God's people had a part in making it work, and their prosperity depended on obedience to His Word, so Jeremiah writes a letter to the Israelites living in exile:

This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper. . . . "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jer. 29:4-7, 10-11).

Seventy years is a lifetime, so the exiles were instructed to make the best of it, and settle down, build houses, raise families, increase in number, plant gardens. If you want to prosper, seek peace and help the city in which you live to prosper. Prepare to stay for a long time, and make it better while you are there. God had a plan for Israel then, and knows the plans He has for His people now. This principle of making life better within the church cultures, and seeking the peace and prosperity of the city can be applied to the Cloverleaf COGOP, or any other present day locality. The New American Standard Bible says, “Seek the welfare of the city . . . and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare” (Jer. 29:7 NASB). The obligation to pray for the city will also benefit the church, so if you want to prosper, you will have to do something about helping the people within the city to prosper. Isaiah prophesied of the coming Messiah who would be anointed “to preach good news to the poor” (Isa. 61:1). Jesus fulfilled this prophesy to heal the brokenhearted, release captives, cause the blind to see, and free the downtrodden from their oppressors (Luke 4:18-19 TLB).

The “Good News of Spiritual Peace”

Although Jesus was anointed to perform physical miracles, there was always a greater purpose. The main reason for miraculous healings was not for the personal benefit of those who were healed. Jesus did not perform miracles on request or demand. The religious rulers demanded a sign, and King Herod wanted to see Jesus perform some miracle, but He would not (Matt. 12:38-39, Mark 8:11-14, Luke 23:8). One of the purposes for performing miracles was to fulfill Old Testament prophecy. Isaiah predicted that the coming Messiah would be identified by supernatural deeds. When John sent

messengers to ask if Jesus was the promised Messiah, He told them, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor” (Matt. 11:4-5). These healings were credentials of the Messiah, and a testimony to John of Jesus' authentic identity. The “physical peace” was to give credence to “spiritual peace” as in the case of a paralytic who was brought to Jesus by four friends. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” which aroused some teachers of the law who were thinking, “Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, “Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins . . .” He said to the paralytic, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all (Mark 2:1-12).

This miracle was performed so that a person could know their sins were forgiven. The paralytic received a physical healing that confirmed the authority of Christ on earth to forgive sins, and then he experienced spiritual peace. The Cloverleaf COGOP was in need of experiencing this spiritual peace among the members.

“Spiritual peace is described by Hulitt Gloer as ‘an inner experience of the individual believer, and is realized in being rightly related - rightly related to God and rightly related to one another.’” He gives the many facets of peace which makes a right relationship with God possible:

The Hebrew word *shalom* expresses the idea of peace, well-being, restoration, reconciliation with God, and salvation in the fullest sense.

- God is “the God of peace” (Rom. 15:33, Phil. 4:9, 1 Thess. 5:23, Heb. 13:20).

- The Gospel is “the good news of peace” because it announces the reconciliation of believers to God and to one another (Eph. 6:15, Acts 10:36, Eph. 2:12-18).
- God has made this peace a reality in Jesus Christ, who is “our peace.”
- We are justified through Him, reconciled through the blood of His cross, and made one in Him (Rom. 5:1, Col. 1:20, Eph. 2:14).
- In Him we discover that ultimate peace which only God can give (John 14:27).
- This peace is experienced as an inner spiritual peace by the individual believer (Phil. 4:7, Col. 3:15, Rom. 15:13).
- It is associated with receptiveness to God’s salvation (Matt. 10:13), freedom from distress and fear (John 14:27, 16:33), security (1 Thess. 5:9-10), mercy (Gal. 6:16, 1 Tim. 1:2), joy (Rom. 14:17, 15:13), grace (Phil. 1:2, Rev. 1:4), love (2 Cor. 13:11, Jude 2), life (Rom. 8:6), and righteousness (Rom. 14:17, Heb. 12:11, Jas. 3:18).
- Such peace is a fruit of the Spirit that forms part of the “whole armor of God” enabling the Christian to withstand the attacks of the forces of evil (Gal. 5:22, Eph. 6:11, 13).⁴

The exiles were to seek and pray for the “shalom of Babylon” so that they themselves would experience peace, prosperity, health, wholeness, physical and spiritual well-being. Seeking peace must begin with personal restoration, and reconciliation with God before salvation could be administered to the citizens within the community. Personal reconciliation with God, and with other members was high on the list for revitalizing the Cloverleaf COGOP, prayer was at the top. God's people were instructed to pray for a pagan ruler, King Nebuchadnezzar. The evil Babylonians were the enemy described in the Book of Habakkuk as a . . .

ruthless and impetuous people, who sweep across the whole earth to seize dwelling places not their own. They are a feared and dreaded people; they are a law to themselves and promote their own honor. . . They fly like a vulture swooping to devour; they all come bent on violence. Their hordes advance like a desert wind and gather prisoners like sand. They deride

⁴ Trent C. Butler, Ph.D. ed., "Spiritual Peace," in Holman Bible Dictionary, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishing, 1991. Electronic Edition STEP Files, Parsons Technology, 1998), QuickVerse 2011.

kings and scoff at rulers. . . guilty men, whose own strength is their god (Hab. 1:6-11).

Babylon was a very dangerous place to live, especially for an Israelite who believed there was only one God. Habakkuk questioned, and complained:

How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, “Violence!” but you do not save? Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted (Hab. 1:2-4).

These questions echo through centuries of time and are as relevant in our own society.

God's answer to Habakkuk was, “Look at the nations and watch and be utterly amazed.

For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told. I am raising up the Babylonians, . . .” (Hab. 1:5-6a). The prophet realized that

Babylonia was appointed to execute judgment on Israel for their sins. God himself was raising up a people to judge Israel, empowering King Nebuchadnezzar, his servant, to fulfill the prophecy (Jer. 27:5-6). God's amazing plan to judge his people included using a pagan King to accomplish his purposes. Israel would be in captivity because of their sins against the LORD.

A Call for Justice

There is a passage in Isaiah which is generally referenced for salvation purposes, and accepted as fact that, “the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear.” Like Habakkuk, people pray for help, but God seems not to be listening. Isaiah speaking for God to His people says the problem is not the reasons why prayer remains unheard. It is because . . .

. . . your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. For your hands are stained with blood, your fingers with guilt. Your lips have spoken lies, and your tongue mutters wicked things. No one calls for justice; no one pleads his case with integrity. They rely on empty arguments and speak lies; they conceive trouble and give birth to evil (Isa. 59:2-4).

Sin continues to separate the people from God, and He will not hear the prayers of murderers, liars, and those who ignore the injustices that are committed around us daily.

Even the lawyers who plead the cases for those wronged have wrong motives.

“Under the veil of the deliverance from Babylon, Isaiah points to a much greater deliverance, which was to be effected by the Messiah; and seldom does he mention the one, without alluding at the same time to the other; . . .”⁵ God's call for justice continues to challenge the people professing to know the Messiah alluded to by the prophet, Isaiah. “We look for justice, but find none; . . . The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; . . .” (Isa. 59: 11, 15-16). Justice was one of the “weightier matters of the law” that the scribes and Pharisees neglected to do which displeased Jesus to the point of calling them “hypocrites” (Matt. 23:23). Scripture has much to say about how seriously God views the injustices in His world, and calls for people with integrity to intervene for the needy. God looks for someone to correct the social wrongs in the land they inhabit.

Standing in the Gap

The people of the land have used oppression, and exercised robbery, and have vexed the poor and needy: yea, they have oppressed the stranger wrongfully. And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not

⁵ Matthew Henry, "Isaiah," in *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Electronic Edition STEP Files, Parsons Technology, Inc., 1998). QuickVerse 2011.

destroy it: but I found none. Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them (Ezek. 22:29-31 KJV).

God's Ecclesia where Cloverleaf is an expression, cannot avoid the responsibility for social justice without incurring God's anger. He still searches for someone to “make up the hedge, and stand in the gap” for the poor, needy, and oppressed. It is God's will for His people to take action against human suffering. How we minister to the poor and needy makes a difference in this present world both physically and spiritually. James says,

What *does it* profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does it* profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? (James 2:14-20 NKJV).

There is no profit in talking to someone who is cold, and hungry about a loving God who “supplies needs” when that person needs food, and warm clothing. Talking about your faith does not get the work done, and at the Final Judgment of God, there will be a spiritual distinction made . . .

Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.” Then the righteous will answer him, saying, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?” And the King will answer them, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me” (Matt. 25:34-40 ESV).

The gospel is more than a set of “right beliefs,” and adhering to rules, “it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes; first for the Jew, then for the Gentile” (Rom. 1:16).

CONNECTING IN THE KINGDOM – THINK GLOBALLY

A Homogeneous Church in Transition

The Cloverleaf COGOP began an intentional turn with a determination to live out the “good news of peace” within the church culture. A self-evaluation revealed that the ability of the church to practice justice and uphold Biblical standards had been weakened by low morality, and injustices. There was very little distinction between the morals of religious practices and the general culture within the community. The spirituality of the church was contaminated by animistic spirituality and resembled the period of time when God’s judgment was ready to fall upon His people by allowing the Babylonians to conquer them. This Pentecostal congregation was already in a “spiritual war” for survival without being equipped to battle the invisible foe.

Spiritual Discernment - True or False

At this juncture, my personal spiritual formation was very helpful, and I was grateful for a father who not only taught, but demonstrated Spiritual power in his ministry, especially during the years of missionary service in the Philippines. The spirituality that dominated Filipino religion in the Philippine Islands, and the oral Shamanist culture in South Korea defined the religious culture of Cloverleaf. As with

Asian spirituality, “no clear division separates between the visible and invisible worlds:”⁶

The animistic view contaminated the Pentecostalism within the church culture because a lack of spiritual discernment tolerated its existence. Animism is:

A perspective on the world that sees spiritual powers or forces as residing in and controlling all of the natural world. Thus an animist would recognize not only spirits in animals and humans but also the spirits of trees, rivers and other natural entities.⁷

Scripture speaks of people “Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, . . . and this toleration of false spirituality opened avenues for the religion of Wicca to be practiced in the Cloverleaf area without confrontation (Rom. 1:25 KJV). Evans defines Wicca as . . .

A religion that centers on witchcraft and the revival of pagan practices. Wiccans deny that their religion involves the worship of Satan and see themselves as fostering a religion that is close to nature and affirmative of such elements of paganism as the worship of “the goddess”—a practice that is linked by Wiccans to radical forms of feminist thought.⁸

False religions such as these may seem harmless, but “worshipping and serving the creature more than the Creator” gives access to demonic activity. “This is what the LORD says: ‘Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD’” (Jer. 17:5). We can know Satan’s schemes, “. . . we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Cor 2:10-11), and one of his schemes is to hide the reality of Jesus Christ, His death, and resurrection. Paul wrote to the church at Galatia where some believers in Jesus Christ were reverting back to the law, and he reminds them.

⁶ Muck, *Handbook of Religion*, 244.

⁷ Stephen C. Evans, “Animism,” in *Pocket Dictionary of Apologetics and Philosophy of Religion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), Kindle.

⁸ Evans, “Wicca,” in *Dictionary of Apologetics and Philosophy*. Kindle.

Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? Have you suffered so much for nothing—if it really was for nothing? Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard? (Gal. 3:1-5).

Paul was addressing those who had received the Holy Spirit, and were now attempting to be righteous by keeping rules, and observing the law. The effect of going back to obeying rules is that Christians are open to believing the lies of false spirits, and substitutes the power of the cross with fleshly means so a person is made to think he can make himself righteous. Spiritual life then becomes dependent on conforming to the governing rules, and Jesus is portrayed as a man who existed in history, but powerless to transform lives. Truth is, “. . . the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18).

True Pentecostal Spirituality

“Pentecostal Spirituality” is based on the Biblical event of the Holy Spirit coming upon the disciples of Christ who were gathered together on the day of Pentecost.

Pentecostalism is rooted in the Holiness of God, through His Son, Jesus, by the Holy Spirit as believers in Christ respond to the Spirit in obedience to God the Father. Jesus wanted his disciples to be “endued with power” so that they would be his witnesses by taking the message of salvation to all the world, beginning in Jerusalem.

The Spirit was heard as a “mighty rushing wind” and visualized as “cloven tongues of fire” resulting in all of them being “filled with the Holy Ghost.” The controversy is generally over the phrase “and began to speak with other tongues, as the

Spirit gave them utterance.” Those who heard them “were bewildered, because they were each one hearing them speak in his own language.” Beliefs vary as to whether or not the “speaking in tongues” was “babel” or “glossolalia” because they heard them “speaking of the mighty deeds of God” in their own native tongue. There was no doubt, however, that something supernatural had happened, and “they all continued in amazement and great perplexity.” On that day, those who spoke in tongues glorified God by telling of His “mighty deeds” in languages they had not learned (Acts 2:6-12 NASB).

The results of “True Spirituality” gives life, and glorifies God. The people heard the “mighty acts of God” in languages they understood. Pentecostal Spirituality is more than “speaking in tongues,” it is functional and active. Jesus ministered to the poor, performed miraculous signs, caused the blind to receive sight, the lame to walk, healed lepers, opened deaf ears, and raised the dead (Matt. 11:4-5). The seven deacons were appointed to distribute food, and others in the early church ministered to the poor, widows, and disadvantaged. The 21st Century Church exists to preach the good news to the poor, feed the hungry, bring water to the thirsty, care for the sick, and stand up against injustices. “And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Mic. 6:8). It is apparent that God loves justice, and his people are instructed to “seek justice.” One of Moses’ instructions for Israel was, “Learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, and plead the case of the widow” (Isa. 1:17). In order to connect with others, the church must find ways to “Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked” (Psa. 82:3-4). One local ministry cannot “right all

injustice,” but the Holy Spirit has already empowered the church to “seek justice” in the cities to which we are sent. Violent crime is composed of four offenses: murder and non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. In Cloverleaf, Texas, on a scale from 1 to 100 is 53; the U.S. average is 31.1. Property crimes in Cloverleaf include burglary, larceny, motor vehicle theft, and arson - 52, which is also above U.S. average 38.1. This is a great challenge in the Houston area where social problems are among the worse nation-wide.⁹

Cultural Barriers Destroyed Through Christ

Globalization has already come to America, and Jesus Christ has already destroyed the barrier between cultures. Paul writes to Gentiles to remember how it was like to be separated from Christ, without hope, and excluded from His promise.

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. (Ephes. 2:11-18)

Christ has broken down the cultural barrier that separated the Jew and Gentiles. Paul understood this separation well because he was a zealous Jew, thoroughly trained in the law, and persecuted the “followers of this Way to their death (Acts 22:2-3).” Now he writes, we are made new creatures in Christ, and we should be reconciled. There is only one way to the Father, and one Holy Spirit so believers in Christ can work in harmony.

⁹"Crime," Cloverleaf, Texas, Best Places 2018, accessed September 28, 2017, <http://www.bestplaces.net/crime/city/texas/cloverleaf>.

Our mission is to share the “Gospel of peace” to everyone, anywhere, and in a language they understand. The Jewish people had forgotten that Christ came not just for their nation only. America often sees themselves as headquarters of the global church, which diminishes the importance of Christians around the world. God does not reside in one nation, “the Most High does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet says: ‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. . . .’” (Acts 7:48-49). When Jesus said, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations. . . .” He was not standing on American soil (Matt 28:19). Jesus said,

Do you not say, “Four months more and then the harvest?” I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. . . . I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor (John 4:34-35, 38).

“Open your eyes and look at the field,” the nations are here, and our mission is to share the Gospel to more than one culture or race. We can no longer hold onto traditional ways of evangelizing, or we will miss the harvest. How can the church effectively work, and worship together in a diverse context?

Avodah: Vocation, Calling, Service

The word for work in Hebrew is *avodah*, and is the same word used for prayer. It also connotes service. Work is not only a necessary part of life, it is a form of service to the world, to the rest of humanity, and to God. The various usages of this Hebrew word found first in Genesis 2:15 tell us that God's original design and desire is that our work and our worship would be a seamless way of living.¹⁰ Our “work” and “service” is then a form of worship, and gives new meaning for worshipping together in unity.

¹⁰ Rabbi Michael Strassfeld, “*Avodah: Vocation, Calling, Service*,” My Jewish Learning, March 31, 2015, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/avodah-vocation-calling-service/>.

God is calling us to a more spiritual way of serving in community, and to be effective in reaching different cultures. Unified diversity in the church is possible when our “work” is done as "worship" to God. Practical ministry is “doing something useful” so that we “may have something to share with those in need” (Ephes. 4:28).

CHAPTER FOUR: PROJECT DESIGN

DEVELOPING A CROSS-CULTURAL CHURCH IN CLOVERLEAF

Introduction and Purpose

The initial purpose for this project was to address problematic issues of a Pentecostal church which was established within the Houston metropolitan area facing imminent closure. General instructions were to see what could be salvaged at this critical point. The Cloverleaf COGOP was functioning with insufficient funding for effective ministry by the time I was notified, and the membership was struggling to maintain church facilities within a high-crime area. Furthermore, this local body operated within the larger infrastructure of a global organization, and held true to traditional activity which had little impact on the community. Statistically, Cloverleaf is a dangerous place to live as stated before in the first chapter, “you have a one in twenty-five chance of becoming a victim of any crime.” In spite of the overwhelming challenges, the congregation made an intentional decision to move from a survival mentality to becoming a cross-cultural ministry within the Cloverleaf community. A more lofty purpose for this project is to benefit emerging leaders who are preparing themselves for Christian ministry, and to equip them with practical ministry tools.

With these purposes in mind, the following questions needed to be considered:

What were the contributing factors that caused gradual decline in this Pentecostal church?

How can the Gospel be made relevant to the multi-cultural, multi-linguistic community?

Why is cross-cultural evangelism necessary in our neighborhood? What will be required of me as part of the ecclesial culture? And, how does a once thriving church move from

the point of closing its doors towards engaging effectively again in a high risk community? These specific questions were foundational for revitalization, and in creating effective strategies for desired positive change both in-house, and the community. These issues will be addressed in the following general areas: Research Method Overview; Data Collection Methods; Documents, Observation, Focus Groups; and Strategies for Meeting the Challenges. Partnerships which were formed prior to my ministry in Cloverleaf are an essential part of this thesis-project as rich experiential qualitative data was collected from them. Strategies were generated in these organizations that are interrelated with Cloverleaf.

Rationale

The qualitative research method was the most appropriate tool for this study because of its naturalistic approach to addressing the challenges of changing cultures. The primary tradition chosen is a case study approach because of its underlying philosophical nature which requires flexibility in Spiritual service. Qualitative data for analysis was derived from actual lived-out experiences, and by working in partnership with diverse ministries in different cultural contexts. These partnerships were formed within the global organizational infrastructure of the COGOP, and with other faith-based Christian organizations. Due to the unpredictable Spiritual involvement factor, procedures for developing a cross-cultural church in Cloverleaf could not be analyzed merely through statistical data, and numbers. The rich information collected from sacrificial service cannot actually be measured, but is relative to Christian ministry. Therefore, qualitative data is compiled largely from lived experiences, and observation.

RESEARCH METHOD OVERVIEW

The kinds of information needed to be compiled and analyzed fell into these general areas: contextual; perceptual; demographic; and theoretical. The Literature review segment contains supportive resources that contributed significantly to the knowledge pool, and the selected literary authors informed this study. However, the data was not included for analysis because developmental issues and relationships with the environment in Cloverleaf were unique to real life situations in Texas. Therefore, the informational data was collected from multiple experiential sources that were distinctly applicable to this particular circumstance for analysis.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

In the process of collecting data, three general methods were utilized: Documents; Observation, and Focus Groups. Demographic information on the Cloverleaf area, and historical data was easily accessed in this high-technology society. The internet simplified the work of finding digital documents, but most of the COGOP history was gathered from historical literature, and personal records. Each question was addressed and answered as thoroughly as possible through these methods. Collecting qualitative data was a slow process, and intentional because each research question was designed to transform mind-sets, and change life-styles. The objectives for this discipline were: to recognize declining tendencies in ministry, and revitalize the church; to be relevant to the community; to cross barriers into the community; and be effective Christian witnesses. With these guiding objectives, steps were taken towards them using the appropriate

methods. Definitive information for the three methods used for this project-thesis is found in the 2002 User-Friendly Handbook for Project Evaluation.¹

Method #1 - Documents Information

Documents are both public and personal records. Public records are created and kept for the purpose of attesting to an event. They are “any written or recorded material” not prepared for the purposes of the evaluation or at the request of the inquirer. The documents that were useful in demographical analysis were census and statistics reports. The documents method was also used for researching historical data pertaining to the Cloverleaf COGOP, and the majority of information was gathered through this method. Personal documents, which are first-person accounts of events and experiences, gave insight into the life and work of the COGOP pioneers, and described the institutional characteristics, and backgrounds. There are more advantages than disadvantages for using the documents method:

Advantages: Available locally; inexpensive; grounded in setting and language in which they occur; useful for determining value, interest, positions, political climate, public attitudes; provide information on historical trends or sequences; provide opportunity for study of trends over time.

Disadvantages: May be incomplete; may be inaccurate or of questionable authenticity; locating suitable documents may pose challenges; analysis may be time consuming and access may be difficult.

This method of collecting data was advantageous because technology has made it inexpensive, and the information was readily available. One of the research

¹ Joy Frechtling Westat, *The 2002 User Friendly Handbook for Project Evaluation. Methods: Focus Groups, Observation, Documents*, accessed January 19, 2018, (Arlington, VA: NSF:2002), https://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2002/nsf02057/nsf02057_4.pdf. 52-54, 57-59.

questions was: "How can the Gospel be made relevant to the multi-cultural, multi-linguistic community?" With the advantages of having internet accessibility, collecting documented information was easily the first step. The following information is an example of informational data which is basic knowledge necessary for connecting with the community:

- Demographics (population, ethnicity, age groups, and religions)
- Community Planning in Cloverleaf
- Law Enforcement (security)
- Housing
- Transportation Systems
- Economic Development
- Educational Systems
- Environmental

These issues were important to the community, and God's Ecclesia was to be involved in righting the injustices in Cloverleaf. By analyzing demographic and social trends, strategies were designed to serve the established purposes for the COGOP in Cloverleaf. Strategic tools were developed in the contexts of crisis, and designed to meet needs for change both in-house, and on the field of ministry. There were too many problems to deal with at once, and according to the documents, the situation was not improving, crime was on the rise. It was time to clean up the neighborhood by identifying the problems. One of the important documents that helped make the ecclesia culture relevant to the community was the *"Cloverleaf Community Plan."*

Residents have special pride and sense of identity with their community and concern for its future. Effective mechanisms for citizen involvement and debate are an essential part of the planning process. Community meetings involve a large number of residents in the identification of concerns, issues, and needs and the development of goals and objectives.²

² "Cloverleaf Community Plan," accessed January 19, 2018, http://www.harriscountytexas.gov/CmpDocuments/103/CommunityPlanCloverleaf/cloverleaf_community.plan.pdf, 64.

Within this document are ways the residents of the community can be involved with neighborhood meetings to voice their own idea on how to improve the community. The categories for community meeting stations are: Housing; Economic Development; Transportation & Infrastructure; Human Services; and Community Facilities.

The Community Planning document gave an insight into their community, and information on how to connect with city departments, and volunteer services to help them. The following strategies materialized by using informational data from documents.

Connect with the City to Accept the Challenge

The objective for connecting with the following organizations is so that the church could know how to be relevant to the community. The problems were: Crime, homelessness, drugs, prostitution, hunger, shut-ins, gangs, graffiti, poverty, sanitation. Action needed to be taken to address them, and documents found on the internet gave the starting points:

Connect with city authorities to change the environment

- City Hall: Attended a community meeting where city officials and law enforcement came to talk with the community, and give time for residents to make them aware of what is happening in their communities. A few of the members went together for support to let them know about the problems in Cloverleaf.
- Coffee with a Cop: This invitation is opened all around the nation. We found one in Houston area, and had coffee and doughnuts with good conversation the law enforcement for our area.
- Neighborhood Crime Watch: This is a program of mutual assistance among neighbors aimed at reducing crime in the community at the grass roots level. It involves getting to know one's neighbors and introducing them to the concept of "good neighbors working together, alert to the potential of crime, and willing to look out for one another's interests.

- Harris County Environmental Enforcement Division: This is the office to which we reported rat-infested areas, and graffiti.

Connect with Educational systems to understand family activities

- Galena Independent School District: A Minister's prayer luncheon is hosted at the Galena ISD to inform local ministers of the school activities in the coming school year.
- Channelview Independent School District: The District Superintendent for Channelview ISD partners with local ministries for prayer, and planning community projects throughout the year.

Connect with food services to meet immediate needs

- Food Donation Connection: Starbucks; Pizza Hut; and Flying J donate left over food to feed the hungry.
- North Channel Food Pantry: Food is donated to non-profits to distribute to the needy in the area.

Method #2 - Observation

Observational techniques are methods used to gather firsthand data on programs, processes, or behaviors being studied. They provide an opportunity to collect data on a wide range of behaviors, to capture a variety of interactions, and to openly explore the evaluation topic. By directly observing operations and activities, the evaluator can develop an understanding of the context within which the project operates. This method is useful during the formative and summative phases of evaluation.³ Collecting data towards accomplishing our objectives required interaction with other ministries for contextual, perceptual; and theoretical information. The advantages for using this method far outweighed the disadvantages for this project.

Advantages: Provide direct information about behavior of individuals and groups; permit evaluator to enter into and understand situation/context;

³ NSF.Gov. Online, Westat, *The User Friendly Handbook for Project Evaluation*, 53-55.

provide good opportunities for identifying unanticipated outcomes; exist in natural, unstructured, and flexible setting.

Disadvantages: Expensive and time consuming; need well-qualified, highly trained observers; may need to be content experts; may affect behavior of participants; selective perception of observer may distort data; behavior or set of behaviors observed may be atypical.⁴

The authenticity of my findings is contingent on observation, and co-laboring with the participants. Personal interest in cross-cultural outreach ministries did not originate with the COGOP in Cloverleaf, they are extensions of prior organizations, and new partners in the Houston area. The following ministries have contributed much informational data through the observation method for developing a cross-cultural ministry in Cloverleaf:

- Lighthouse Christian Ministries (LCM), Bacliff, Texas
- Lighthouse Learning Center (LLC), Bacliff, Texas
- Food Donation Connection (FDC): Pizza Hut; Starbucks; Flying J
- Channelview Ministry Team (CMT), Houston, Texas
- For His Glory Drama & Care Ministry (FHG), Texarkana, Texas
- English Academic Mastery Camp (EAMC): USA - Korean Exchange

Personal experiences, and practices learned through partnering with these organizations impacted the Cloverleaf area in various ways. Their success stories were inspiring, and their strategies modeled other areas of ministry in similar circumstances. Informational data drawn from these participating organizations addressed the same challenges found in Cloverleaf. The LCM and LCC educational components: General Education Diploma (GED) and English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) were assimilated with Cloverleaf's need for quality education.

⁴ NSF.Gov. Online, Westat, *The User Friendly Handbook for Project Evaluation* Westat, *The User Friendly Handbook for Project Evaluation. Methods*, 53-55.

Educational Needs

With a forty percent high school drop-out rate, illiteracy compounded critical poverty issues that characterized Cloverleaf. Citizens within the community who frequented the church, were satisfied with being literate enough to "just get by," and the same attitude existed within the church culture. The need was for citizens who were able to reason by using the ability to read and write. Their acquired skills could then be used to benefit people, gain resources, and improve the environment. In answer to this need, a substitute teacher in the congregation volunteered as a tutor for regular GED classes as a service to the Cloverleaf population. The impact of this practical ministry was felt first within the COGOP congregation when an elderly member received her GED Certificate. The significance for this achievement was that she was one of the remaining members left with the giant share of church responsibility, and was functioning as Bible teacher, and treasurer. The "rubber-stamped" ecclesial ethos had stifled her educational development with a belief that formal education is a waste of time,⁵ and traditional learned practices were good enough for leadership. Her achievement carried a strong witness to the importance of education in addressing illiteracy issues in Cloverleaf. By connecting with the educational public sector, the citizens of Cloverleaf were given an opportunity to excel through the COGOP tutoring classes, and go beyond "good enough." A teen-ager who had joined with this elderly woman in the first group of GED students dropped out because the material was too difficult for him. He was incarcerated a couple

⁵ Church of God of Prophecy Center for Biblical Leadership, *Foundations: A Concise History/Doctrine*, (White Wing Publishing House, Cleveland, TN, 1998), 62-63.

years later, but on viewing a picture of her receiving a certificate, he was encouraged to enroll in an educational program for inmates, and received a diploma as well.

The language barrier between English and Spanish speakers was addressed through an ESL Series entitled, *“From Beginning to End.”* This faith-based course used the Bible stories to teach English literacy within ten sessions. It was conducted for the benefit of the community, but specifically targeted two Spanish congregations to unite them in practical ministry.

Since the church functioned with insufficient funds, teaching biblical stewardship and money management skills were given precedence. God intended to bless "all people in all nations," and the congregation needed to have something with which to bless them. This challenge was met with conducting craft workshops so that the members could learn to work with their own hands in order to “have something to share with those in need” (Ephes. 4:28). Workshop skills included woodworking, ironworks, quilting, and visual arts that produced fundraisers which were advertised, and sold through internet services. The quilting workshops resulted in a "Comfort Quilt" practical ministry which serves several purposes. The hand-made lap quilts were used to raise funds to support church ministries, and given away to wheelchair patients, and orphans. They have impacted Cloverleaf through the police department who uses them when a domestic violence call is received. Babies and small children are commonly involved in this high-crime area when the police receive calls to settle domestic disputes, and the quilts are given to comfort the innocent victims as the policeman or woman wraps them in a quilt. We have found that many of the first responders in this area serve with a Christ-like spirit. Through the “coffee with a cop” program, the church initiated an important connection for security,

and eased the strain between Cloverleaf citizens and law enforcement. Because of the cultural reality of high visibility issues, it was imperative to maintain a good relationship with first responders.

Cleaning up Cloverleaf

Demographical information gathered from public documents revealed that the COGOP was centered within an overcrowded, high-crime neighborhood with low-income families living in over-priced housing.⁶ Cloverleaf was a place of ministry where hard lessons were learned. Not everyone was receptive to the good intentions of the church. Traditional forms of worship, and mid-week gatherings had become ineffective tools for accomplishing the main objective of sharing the “Good News” because the culture involved so much bad news. The language barrier consisted of more than communication between the English and Spanish speakers. Gangs within the area had their own form of graffiti marking their territory, and indicating gang-related activities. This form of communication was foreign to the church members, and the religious rhetoric was meaningless to those outside of the organization. A meeting with the police department in Cloverleaf revealed that much of the adverse activity was done in neglected areas that were eye-sores in need of cleaning.

Partnering with city government offices and the "For His Glory Drama & Care Ministry" (FHG) was necessary to clean up Cloverleaf. Planned community projects were: 1) Clearing a vacant lot that was being used for wild partying, and attracted unwanted pests; 2) cleaning up the junk yard that covered ten lots across the street from the sanctuary; and 3) removing graffiti from eye-sore vacant buildings used as temporary

⁶ City Data, Cloverleaf, Texas, accessed September 29, 2017, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Cloverleaf-Texas.html>.

shelters by the homeless, drug dealing, prostitution, and gang activity. The general consensus was to avoid these issues because this cultural reality had penetrated into the normal life of Cloverleaf. However, in March 2012, strategies for cleaning up Cloverleaf were planned by the COGOP congregation after voicing these grievances in a City Hall Community Meeting. As a result of this meeting, a list of government offices was issued that existed for graffiti clean-up, homeless panhandler issues, and environmental problems. All of the graffiti visible within Cloverleaf was scouted out and reported to the Graffiti Abatement Program, and each reported case was cleaned up.

The environmental issue of having ten city lots filled with corroded truck trailers, broken-down heavy equipment, and unwanted household furniture was a great challenge. Research into the history of the property showed that the owner was deceased, and left the property in the hands of a family member who did not live in Cloverleaf. It took several months before action was taken, and the clean-up completed. The project involved an official communication to initiate the work, and several weeks for clean-up crews to remove heaps of rubbish using city dump trucks. Manpower was supplied by inmates for removing old tires, and garbage. Trailer homes now occupy the land for much needed housing, and a large portion of crime activity on church property was eradicated.

With minimum manpower, the COGOP joined forces to clean up the neighborhood, beginning with the church property which covered one-fourth of a city block, with two buildings. The environmental conditions of the neighborhood required the necessity for coordinating the annual exchange program in which the pastor trained the youth team members in exchange for their community service. "For His Glory Drama & Care Ministry" was established to inspire, encourage, and empower others to discover

their life's purpose and destiny. This ministry purposed to equip the next generation with the tools that build character, and honor God through community service. Part of this ministry was a youth "Spring Break Community Service" outreach program that offered one week of youth activity and community projects. Cloverleaf was the focus for five Spring break programs and included:

- Clearing an entire vacant lot to eliminate unwanted pests, and activity
- Helping with food distribution to the homeless, and needy families
- Church building renovations to improve public facilities
- Cleaning up yards for the elderly and disabled to improve the environment
- Sharing the Gospel through outside drama, and tract distribution

Good Deeds Carry “Danger Ahead” Signs

There are dangers for doing good things, and those who are in Christian ministry will need to learn that an act of kindness can turn on you. No matter how good the intentions are, there may be adverse effects. Such was the case in Cloverleaf when the squatter decided to take over the parsonage, claiming it was his home because the pastor had abandoned it. He was allowed to stay a few nights which turned into a nightmare of several months, and a cost for court eviction. J.C. used his incarceration to study the laws for abandoned buildings, and the pastor had vacated the parsonage, he used the address for parole communications and establishing residency. Another adverse effect was learned in the food distribution program that was intended to feed the hungry. People became dependent on the system for survival, and the system was not empowering the citizens of Cloverleaf to be self-sufficient. One man called every day waiting for pizza

pick-up because he was depending on this meal, as did the prostitutes who serviced truck drivers in a Wal-mart parking lot.

Food for Hungry Stomachs Instead of Landfills

“Food Donation Connection” provides an alternative to discarding surplus wholesome food by linking food service donors with surplus food to local hunger relief agencies. It is not meant to teach dependency on a system, but to redirect excess prepared food to hungry stomachs rather than landfills. We do this by creating and maintaining an efficient communication and reporting network that links available sources of food to those in need through these existing charitable organizations.

Observation of the people in this community that walk the streets, and sleep under bridges attest to the poverty and hunger. However, one young man was given food and an opportunity to work, but chose to sleep under the overpass of I-10. He would rather beg than work, as is the case for many on the streets. Another man would call for the food and take as much as an old shopping basket would hold. We never really knew what he did with so much at one time, but the possibility in a drug infested society is that some was being used to satisfy another need besides hunger.

Having pointed out the pitfalls of doing good deeds, there has also been many needy families fed through the donations of Starbucks, Pizza Hut, Chick-fil-e, and Flying J restaurants. One report showed an average of 14,000 products donated from Starbucks, and Pizza in a twelve-month period, along with car-loads donated every week from Flying J, picked up and distributed through the Cloverleaf COGOP. Through the Food Donation Connection Program, surplus

food is directed to the homeless, shut-ins, and anyone in need of food in the surrounding community.

A unique exchange program brought cultural learning to Cloverleaf residents when a group of five selected Koreans were sponsored to participate in an emerging leaders, total immersion English (ESL) program. Part of their learning experience in Cloverleaf was to participate in distributing food to the poor. All participants in this cultural exchange program were impacted in a positive way because these candidates were chosen based on their character, conduct, and spirituality. Not only did they participate in feeding the hungry, but they ministered the Gospel through traditional Korean martial arts, and drum performances.

The food distribution ministry had opened the door for the Spanish pastor to share the Gospel of Christ to the Spanish speakers outside the walls of the church. With a sound system, and a table of free food, the people heard the message preached in their native language on the main street in Cloverleaf.

This congregation could not operate as a typical church because of its lack of resources, funds, and manpower. The COGOP needed to find its niche in Cloverleaf that made the Gospel relevant with the resources available. By partnering with the Channelview ministry Team (CMT), positive changes in the morals of Cloverleaf could be affected. The CMT is an open, multi-denominational family of Christian believers that gathers on a monthly basis to pray and help to provide solutions to community concerns within Channelview and its surrounding communities while representing the love and mission of Jesus Christ as seen in the Gospel (Matt. 25:35-36). This group is open to all

members of the community business leaders, educators, families, ministers, students. Channelview borders Cloverleaf in the Houston eastside metropolitan area, and the activities are in conjunction because we share the same issues. In the last Christmas Toy Drive, the Cloverleaf Fire Department collected the largest percentage of gifts for needy families in the community. Bicycles were donated by CMT members, and awarded to the most improved students who are chosen for their courage against difficult circumstances to stay in school, and out of gangs. This is a fairly new partnership within the East Houston metropolitan, and plans are to expand these ministries into the Cloverleaf School District in the near future. Within this rare group, participants cross all the cultural barriers that challenged the Cloverleaf COGOP. Prayer is a priority element for reaching out to the community, and this organization strives to be an expression of God's Ecclesia in this part of the world. The diversity of participants working together for the same purposes is an inspiration to all Christian ministries. Unique to CMT is the seamless relationship between worship, service, and work among the members, and unified diversity best characterizes its practical ministry. In 2017, Hurricane Harvey devastated Houston, and presented emergency opportunities that tested the strength of this unified effort. The compilation of qualitative data from this one source of information alone is staggering.

Method #3 - Focus Groups

Focus groups combine elements of both interviewing and participant observation. The focus group session is, indeed, an interview—not a discussion group, problem-solving session, or decision-making group. At the same time, focus groups capitalize on

group dynamics. The hallmark of focus groups is the explicit use of the group interaction to generate data and insights that would be unlikely to emerge otherwise. The technique inherently allows observation of group dynamics, discussion, and firsthand insights into the respondents' behaviors, attitudes, language. Because of the element of interviewing, there are advantages and disadvantages:

Advantages: usually yield richest data, details, new insights; permit face-to-face contact with respondents; provide opportunity to explore topics in depth; allow interviewer to experience the affective as well as cognitive aspects of responses; allow interviewer to explain or help clarify questions, increasing the likelihood of useful responses; allow interviewer to be flexible in administering interview to particular individuals or in particular circumstances

Disadvantages: expensive and time-consuming; need well-qualified, highly trained interviewers; interviewee may distort information through recall error, selective perceptions, desire to please interviewer; flexibility can result in inconsistencies across interviews; volume of information very large; may be difficult to transcribe and reduce data.⁷

The advantages of having focus groups was the greatest strength of this organization. This method included small group gatherings which is central to the organizational structure in conducting weekly scheduled Bible studies. However, the data focus was on maintaining church facilities, and preserving the status quo which negated an outward view. Survival issues experienced in the Cloverleaf community were as significant among the COGOP members resulting in the inability to help their neighbor. A paradigm shift initiated within these focus groups gave new insight, and direction. Spirituality issues were identified, and acknowledged through focusing on prayer, and the Word. Practical service resulted from the mid-week focus group Bible study. Through studying the Word, and applying the biblical principles to benefit people, an outward

⁷ NSF.Gov. Online, Westat, *The User Friendly Handbook for Project Evaluation*, http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2002/nsf02057/nsf02057_4.pdf. 52-53.

focus gave vision for making positive changes in the community. One of the strategies was a workshop adapted to the learning ability of the participants entitled, *"Getting Ahead in a Just Gettin'-by World."* The strategy was developed for improving the environment, and economical status of the participants. This was one of the Focus Group sessions that empowered some of the COGOP congregants to move from living from paycheck-to-paycheck, and produced the top financial supporters.

"Getting Ahead in a Just-Getting-by World"

Getting Ahead in a Just Getting-by-World was written for people in poverty, and was relevant to a high percentage of the people in Cloverleaf. It provides a way to examine the impact that poverty has on individuals, families, and their communities. The aim is to provide a safe, agenda-free learning environment where adults can: reflect on and examine their lives; investigate new information that is relevant to them; assess their own resources; make their own choices; enjoy the power that comes from solving problems; and managing their own lives. They will learn to make plans for their own future stories, and offer ideas for building a prosperous community.

This program is designed for small groups of ten to twelve students who commit to twelve two-hour sessions. They are paid for being there, but must have perfect attendance, and complete the homework.

Some Objectives:

- Describing and defining what poverty is like in our community
- Take charge of "thinking"
- Learn the causes of poverty
- Define poverty, and resources, create a "Mental Model of Social Capital"
- Understand that poverty is not just caused by individual choice and behavior
- Poverty causes may exist (or not exist) in the community

This is just a sampling list of the objectives for this intensive study which taught the congregation good stewardship. Participants learned that they can deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in solving community problems.

Important elements in conducting this workshop included:

- Getting people at the planning and decision-making table
- Diverse poverty experiences: different circumstances, and backgrounds
- Participants are paid for the information they provide to the community
- Motivation for change
- Learning how to work in community

After this series, the focus turned towards what could be done about these problems. The strategies discovered in this workshop naturally assimilated with the ecclesial culture.

One of the significant problems present in this project-thesis was the impact that certain rulings had on a local church ministry. The focus group method easily filled the traditional Sunday School hour with an outward focus.

DEVELOPING “CHRIST-CENTERED” STRATEGIES

Strategies and methods for cross-cultural evangelism are as diverse and numerous as the gifts, talents and skills of the people groups operating within the church. By virtue of God’s nature, a Spirit-led congregation will have an outward focus because God intended to bless all the people, and the Holy Spirit was sent to empower believers to tell the “Good News” to all nations. His involvement is vital for effective Christian ministry which is carried out by people who do not live for themselves, but “for the One who died for them and was raised” (2 Cor. 5:15b). It is in partnering with the Holy Spirit that makes Christian ministry unpredictable, amazing, and exciting.

SUMMARY

Taking a local congregation from a "survival" mentality to engaging with the community is impossible without the guidance, and complete involvement of the "Spirit of Truth." The methods used are limited to one case study in Cloverleaf and by observing real-life ministry that changes frequently, so there needed to be flexibility in adapting qualitative data. Developing a cross-cultural church in Cloverleaf required partnering with other organizations that continue to inspire outward and upward movement. The flow of ministry was not dependent on human ability, and intelligence within the ministries presented here. Ministry flows from the "Spirit of Truth" and by completely relying on a power more capable, and powerful than natural strength. The outward focus motivated the strategies.

CHAPTER FIVE: OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSIONS

RESEARCH SUMMARY

God of the universe called one man, Abraham, through whom He would bless “all peoples on earth” by promising one Savior, whose kingdom contains the saving work of Christ, for “all nations”. God's church is to be the visible expression of the Head, Jesus Christ, telling this "Good News" to everyone in the world, including the peoples who lived in Cloverleaf. The conditions for accomplishing Christ’s commission was not favorable towards the COGOP at this point, and the general consensus for positive change in the Cloverleaf area was beyond hope. Numerous challenges distanced the ecclesial society from the community, and threatened to halt church activity altogether.

Objective

The primary objective for this study was to restore relevancy of the Gospel between the estranged COGOP congregation and the diverse community in which it was established. Important to reaching that objective was to understand why the church had little spiritual impact on changing the face of the surrounding community. Due to Hispanic migration, a language barrier existed between English and Spanish speakers with the Spanish population being the majority. Furthermore, this was not an isolated situation due to the influences of a centralized government which had global impact. My personal ministry involved two other areas of pastoral ministry, and the circumstances were similar to Cloverleaf. Therefore, recognizing the contributing factors, and declining

tendencies within the infrastructure is important to developing an effective Christian ministry in the Cloverleaf area.

Contributing Factors

Two venues were open for consideration in identifying some contributing factors that made the Gospel message irrelevant to its community: 1) COGOP ecclesial culture influences, and 2) challenges within the community. Each venue was limited by its own expectations of the other which made interaction difficult.

COGOP Ecclesial Culture Influences:

The written or unwritten rules of tradition limited the COGOP congregation which contributed to its homogeneous ecclesial culture. Rule-keepers had learned to avoid rule-breakers which developed into irreconcilable differences. The people who needed to hear about the saving work of Christ remained outside the walls which were erected to protect the rule-keepers. Regular attendees of this local church operated within the acceptable ecclesial culture, and were comfortable with keeping the status quo. Rule-keepers placed full responsibility of the injustices committed within the community on the rule-breakers, and city law enforcement. The responsibility of the COGOP congregation was limited to attending one hour of traditional Bible class and one hour of personal sharing/worship on Sunday morning, depending on speaker availability. These scheduled services were traditionally viewed as obligatory for the members who considered Sunday School class attendance equal to obedience, and faithfulness to God. This long-standing tradition was influenced by a ruling of the centralized government early in its history, and had no appeal outside of the congregation.

The exclusivity issue contributed largely to making the COGOP irrelevant to this community because the “restorationist impulse”¹ claim resulted in an ongoing exaltation of the church. This exclusive body ecclesiology was not conducive to the unified concept within the kingdom of God. The exclusivity issue was officially reversed by the COGOP governing authority in July 2000, but not fully accepted in the ecclesiology within the Cloverleaf congregation after twelve years. The fact that “no single group can lay claim to being the exclusive body of Christ,”² required a paradigm shift in ministerial praxis.

Another controlling factor was the lack of formal education as historically, no emphasis on higher education was evident between 1923-1958, which revealed the fact that leadership in the COGOP had a defective education. Their spiritual formation developed during a time-period when formal education was considered a waste of time, and were taught to “parrot established doctrine and practices.”

Challenges Within the Community:

One of the goals for conducting a weekly Sunday School was to "elevate the morals of a community". Opportunities for raising Cloverleaf's morals were overwhelming: High-crime; low-income; at-risk youth; defective education; and impoverished population. Hispanic migration contributed to the multi-linguistic, and multi-cultural issues that impacted the entire population. The spirituality within the community had contaminated Pentecostalism among the COGOP membership.

¹ H. D. Hunter, "Church of God of Prophecy (CGP)," in *New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, eds. Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. Van Der Maas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002, 2003), 540-541.

² *Church of God of Prophecy Minutes of 91st International General Assembly*, 2000, 105.

A Paradigm Shift

As the problems materialized within the local church structure, intentional steps were taken to change non-essential activity, and incorporate what was essential for making the Gospel relevant to the contemporary community issues. Procedures included evaluation of church facilities, records, and service which led to:

- Setting up an accounting system where none existed
- Conducting regular business meetings for planning strategies
- Fellowship luncheon meetings
- Facility maintenance activity: renovating, cleaning, beautifying
- Planning community outreach projects
- Partnering with other organizations
- Sharing space with Spanish congregations
- Training leaders - discovering gifts and resources

“For His Glory: Drama & Community Service” youth team was brought in every spring to learn skills, attend workshops, and complete various projects for the community. A small sample of their activities included:

- Learning construction skills: insulation, sheetrock, tiling
- Community service projects
- Field trips: NASA, museums, historical sites
- Arts & Crafts: Skills in woodworking; ironworks
- Food distribution
- Drama performances
- Workshops/Seminars: Practical ministry, finance, relationships

Challenges in the community were approached through the public sector out of necessity because the church was burglarized several times. The process of connecting with the community began with practical ministries to meet the immediate needs: homelessness, poverty, hunger, housing, low-income families, at-risk, health issues, drugs, prostitution, gang related activity, and environmental issues. These challenges were too great for this small group, and required an involvement with city government. A community meeting at City Hall was by city officials, and law enforcers who permitted

our grievances to be heard. This meeting brought positive results for building cooperative relationships with city governmental offices. It was important to meet the first responders who served our community, so here are some ways the Cloverleaf COGOP built healthy relationships:

- First Responders Appreciation Banquet: This is one of the community activities the Channelview Ministry Team (CMT) in which policemen, firemen, emergency service, and all other 1st responders are honored. Volunteers served their meals, and I prayed for them.
- Coffee with a Cop: We were given the opportunity to talk about our places of business, and make the police aware of the activities. Through this activity, we connected with a food pantry run by a policewoman in one of the highest crime areas of Houston.
- Harris County Environmental Enforcement Division: This office had to be utilized often to clean up eye-sore areas in the Cloverleaf area. The results were noticeable within a year.
- Food Donation Connection: Starbucks was one of the first to donate to the Cloverleaf church. Pizza Hut contributed food from three different locations. Flying J donates three times a week, and the church distributes food in cooperation with two other churches
- North Channel Food Pantry: This organization contributed food for the church to fix 150 take-out dinners for the homeless at Thanksgiving. Two policewomen helped serve, and pass out the vouchers to the hungry on the street.

These connections were made to address the immediate needs of this community.

The spiritual needs could be addressed only after the people saw the Gospel being expressed in practical ways.

Spiritual Discernment

One of the greatest challenges for the Cloverleaf COGOP was discerning true spirituality from other-worldly spirits. Forms of animism contaminated the spirituality of

the COGOP, and a lack of spiritual discernment allowed freedom of false spirituality within the ecclesial ethos, particularly concerning the Trinity concept.

Animism is a perspective on the world that sees spiritual powers or forces as residing in and controlling all of the natural world. Thus an animist would recognize not only spirits in animals and humans but also the spirits of trees, rivers and other natural entities.³ This false spirituality opened the door for the religion of Wicca to be practiced even within this Pentecostal congregation. The spirituality issue could not be ignored, or avoided as they manifested within the families of COGOP church members:

- Astral projection
- Obelisk built in backyard
- Wearing pentagrams jewelry
- Reading daily horoscopes
- Wiccan religion – believing in white magic
- Psychedelic drugs for a spiritual awakening
- Molecule drug – one of the most common psychedelic chemicals in the world
- Hallucinogenic drugs used in shamanic rituals in the Amazon
- Role-playing games: RuneScape – medieval fantasy realm where players travel in a number of methods (foot, magical spells); Dungeons and Dragons

The people who were actively involved saw nothing wrong with experimenting with them, nor were they aware of the dangers. During a focus group meeting, one of the members was convicted and wanted to destroy her witchcraft paraphernalia, but she found it too difficult to burn and tried to bury them instead. Eventually, they were burned.

Methods – Documents, Observation, Focus Groups

The demographic informational data for the city of Cloverleaf was collected from public documents using the internet. Much of the data collected was used in focus groups where I taught about the community in which they served. Important information was

³ Evans, *Dictionary of Apologetics and Philosophy of Religion*, s.v. Animism.#

gathered: History; location; demographic; infrastructure; housing community facilities; housing; public services; economic development; revitalization projects. This information was needed for the workshop, *“Getting Ahead in a Just-Getting-by World”*. It was used to inform, and teach the participants on how to live strategically, save money, and open accounts which was not possible before this workshop series was taught.

The Sunday School hour was transformed from operating as an in-house meeting into a focus group that prayed for community needs. This action caused a new reality to form within the COGOP, and become more relevant to contemporary needs. Patience was necessary to make a change in the long-standing tradition which had become an obligation and duty to attend. But, when the time was right, a transition was made, and the room transformed into a “Spiritual War Zone”. On Sunday morning at 10:00 a.m. the people brought their requests, and I taught lessons regarding prayer. The subject was “Prayer” for several months, and the hour was set aside for teaching, and praying according to the Word. This “Spiritual War Zone” produced more results than any other strategy planned. It became a focus group that turned outward to the needs of the community, and answers to prayer brought an exciting expectation. This outward focus changed the whole atmosphere of the local church.

Interrelated Ministries

Working with multi-linguistic cultures towards the same purpose is problematic for a homogeneous society, and the number of Spanish speakers now surpassed English speakers. At the time of my appointment to Cloverleaf, I was still involved with the following Christian ministries that included an English-as-a-Second Language (ESL)

educational component. The qualitative data collected for educational purposes from these organizations were incorporated in practical ministries at Cloverleaf:

- Lighthouse Christian Ministries, Bacliff, Texas
- Academic Mastery Camp, Warda, Texas
- English Academic Mastery Camp, South Korea

Lighthouse Christian Ministries: This organization informed my ministerial praxis largely because I was a charter Board Member, and learned by observing a successful businessman. His sacrificial giving, and business skills were observed carefully and helped me to coordinate several English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) mission trips to South Korea, and Peru. The Cloverleaf COGOP was exposed to these educational programs immediately following my pastoral appointment. This helped to strengthen the outward focus for community service as volunteers in Christian ministry.

English Academic Mastery Camp: The Korean connection that began in 2007 was an ESL Mission program that uses the English language as a tool for crossing language barriers. Two pilot programs were hosted by the Cloverleaf COGOP: USA South Korea Vision 2012; and Emerging Leaders Pilot Program 2014. These International educational tools served to build relationships across cultures globally, and gave us a platform to speak with non-Christian educators in other cultures. Cultural learning was observed through inter-relational activities, within various contexts. The Korean college students shared their culture in the USA through traditional Martial Arts and Korean Drum performances for a variety of organizations throughout the USA.

Houston Eastside Prayer Gathering: The Cloverleaf COGOP members became regular attendees of these prayer meetings and hosted one of them. This church had learned the power of prayer using the Focus Groups method.

Channelview Ministry Team: This group does more than just gather once a month to pray. Activities are numerous, and interaction with the public sector opens up unique opportunities to improve the community. Cloverleaf COGOP has served the community by partnering with the diverse ministries represent in this group: teachers; businessmen; pastors; bus drivers; non-profit supervisors; policemen and women; and other outreach volunteers. The Channelview Independent School District (CISD) Superintendent hosts the meeting in the CISD Board Room.

The inter-relational experiences observed through these ministries are a sampling of what can be done by small focus groups working together in the kingdom of God.

RESULTS OF FINDINGS

Not an Isolated Problem

The circumstances in Cloverleaf was not an isolated problem because of the impact of a centralized government. All of the COGOP local congregations in which I served were similar, each having the same Pentecostal roots. For instance, they shared the same ecclesiastical background with its societal norms, rulings, and traditions. Within the ethos of each congregation there was a strong belief in having unity among all Christian denominations with a “one body” mentality, and they took pride in adhering to the rulings handed down to them from a centralized government. The adverse effect was a belief that salvation could be obtained by keeping these rules when, in fact, the church cannot “lay claim to the salvific work of Christ.” All true believers are connected by their mutual salvation experience, and hope in the atonement of Christ. It is the work of the Holy Ghost to place true believers in his body. The Cloverleaf COGOP struggled in

being relevant to their community until the congregation changed this exclusivity mindset, and focused on the needs of others. The exclusivity ecclesiology was reversed, but initiating a paradigm shift in the ecclesia ethos was the greatest challenge in developing a cross-cultural church. The effects of this contributing factor can be seen in many places where churches are struggling to survive with minimal manpower, and insufficient funds.

Training Workers

Training leaders was challenging because the people who volunteered were outside the acceptable comfort zone of the church. They were prostitutes, and ex-convicts claiming Christianity, but manifesting animistic beliefs. There was little distinction in the spirituality displayed in the church and the spirituality practiced in the community. The life-styles of prostitutes was accepted as necessary for survival, so these volunteers were surprised when leadership positions were closed without training. Prepared sermons had to be visual due to defective education, and most of the people attending had very little knowledge of Scripture. Therefore, preparing power-point presentations was a crucial part of presenting the Gospel which doubled study time. The challenges in the community were just as complex and difficult, but God's church was empowered with the Holy Spirit, and we were taught by him at every turn. It took changing an outdated, irrelevant tradition, and replacing it with a Spiritual War Zone to meet the challenges.

Connecting to the Community

By connecting with the “powers that be” in the city, the Cloverleaf COGOP was able to make positive changes in the face of this community. The garbage dump areas,

and vacant lots frequented by drug dealers and prostitutes were cleared, and now have housing on them. Graffiti was painted over by using in-mate human resources, and the hungry were fed regularly through food from restaurants that would otherwise be in the dump. Working in unity with other Christian organizations has given strength to serve that could not have been done alone.

With insufficient funds, the people learned to give what they had already possessed. One member cleaned out a shed belonging to her mother, and found boxes of material which had been stored for several years. The material was donated to the church, and comfort lap quilts are made by an elderly member who was on a fixed income. These quilts were given to orphans, wheel-chair patients, and police department: When police are called to violent situations, the quilts are wrapped around the babies to comfort them.

Practical ministries do not depend on the number of people serving, nor the amount of money available. Divine provision is promised to “followers” of Christ, and being obedient to His Word. He supplies according to His riches, not ours, so the offerings taken up on Sunday morning were cans of food for the hungry, blankets, and socks for the homeless. Even the language barrier does not prevent Christians from working in unity towards the same purposes when we are “followers” of God instead of reacting to the circumstances. Practical ministry proceeds out of first being the visible expression of Jesus lived out in the community with available resources. The kingdom of God contains the saving work of Christ, and the COGOP exists to be an expression of Christ to the community.

CONCLUSION

The Cloverleaf COGOP did not terminate its ministry because a small group of volunteers were determined to be a light in their community. They made the necessary sacrifices to produce practical ministry relevant to their community. To survive, the congregation needed to know what caused the decline. By identifying the causal effects of an exclusivity ecclesiology, and turning the focus toward the needs in the community, the church remained alive. Total reliance upon the Holy Spirit's guidance transformed a homogeneous society into a practical ministry that crossed every cultural barrier.

RECOMMENDATION

The Cloverleaf COGOP recognized the detrimental effects of functioning with an exclusivity ethos despite doctrinal reversal efforts by its central government. Due to its infrastructure, this is not an isolated case, and an honest self-assessment of mission effectiveness is recommended for those impacted, and experiencing decline. Where transnational immigration has significantly changed the ethnic, and linguistic face of the community, mission activity should be refocused to include the global citizen. Furthermore, cross-cultural ministry requires a global mission mindset which allows a congregation to be more than just a multi-ethnic church, but a "glocal" one. This new kind of church gives global-minded leaders freedom to make the "holistic wellness" message relevant to the people within the community regardless of their culture.

“WORKING IN UNITY - SERVING OUR COMMUNITY”

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